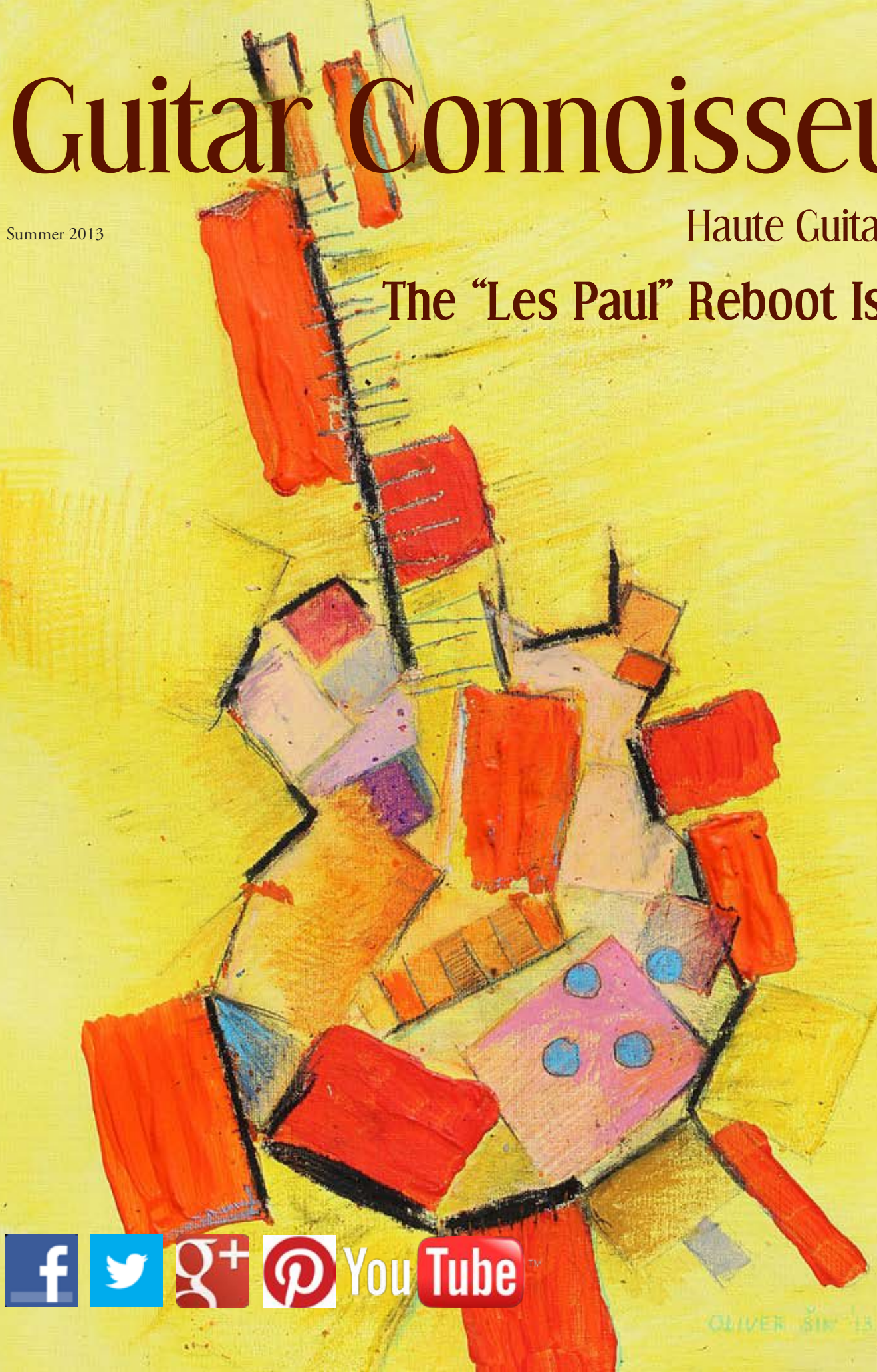
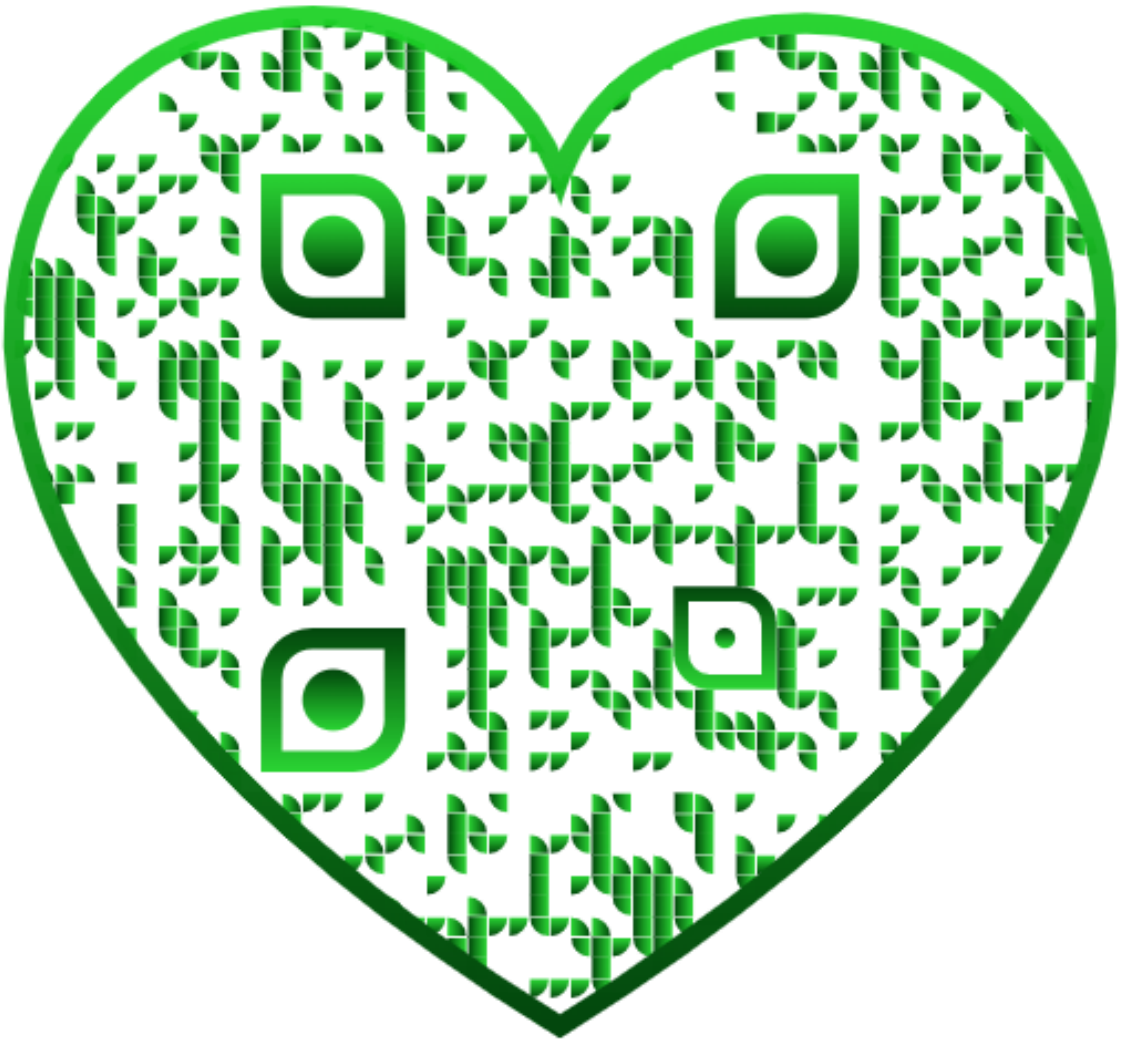
Guitar Connoisseur

Summer 2013

Haute Guitars

The "Les Paul" Reboot Issue





contributors

JP HOLESWORTH

Copy Editor and Columnist for Guitar Connoisseur/Blogger

JP Holesworth has authored Stratoblogster Guitar Blog since 2006. He lives in the Pacific Northwest, subsisting mainly on berries, Nutella and local India Pale Ales. When not writing, cooking or playing guitar he can sometimes be seen hiking the hills south of Kennewick, WA, searching the skies for Stratocaster shaped cloud formations.

www.stratoblogster.com

PASQUALE "PAT" BIANCULLI

Columnist/Pro Musician/Educator

Born and raised in Brooklyn NY, Pasquale "Pat" Bianculli, studied classical guitar with Jerry Willard and Edgard Dana, at the Guitar Workshop in Oyster Bay, NY. He received his M. Mus. degree from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1981. The same year, he had the honor of performing for the legendary guitarist, Andres Segovia, in Granada, Spain. As a recitalist, he has been heard across the U.S., Canada, Europe and the Caribbean. In 1983, he made his New York solo debut at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. Both he and his wife, flutist, Kathy McDonald, have shared music teaching careers, and continue to consult as well as record and perform their own works.

www.fluteandguitarduo.com

JESSE IAN HOPKINS

Columnist/Luthier

A 1998 graduate of the Galloup School of Lutherie, Jesse has worked as a repair technician for a number of local music stores in the Detroit, MI area. He also built guitars for Reverend Musical Instruments from 2000 to 2006 before being hired as a custom luthier at First Act Inc's Studio For Artists in Boston, MA.

After returning to Michigan in 2007, Jesse built the first in a series of prototypes of what would become his own personal line of guitars. In 2010, with the help of his father Larry, J&L Guitar Company was formally launched and the resulting instruments are a marriage of classic aesthetics and modern design. These elements are brought together using traditional "by hand" building techniques and only the finest woods and hardware.

www.jandlguitarcompany.com

ANDREW SCOTT

Columnist/Luthier

Luthier, Andrew Scott, the brainchild of Colorado based Blindworm Guitars, is on a lifelong quest is to improve sound, beauty and functionality, by exploring non-traditional methods and pushing boundaries. His unusual sonic masterpieces incorporate unique materials and sleek design with equal obsession over precision and tonal quality. Andrew's custom instruments are typically tailored for specific clients.

blindwormguitars.com

ROD DEGEORGE

Columnist/Pro Musician/Educator

Rod DeGeorge is a guitar teacher, live performer and highly prolific session musician. He has written, recorded and produced commercial jingles and compositions for several national ad campaigns and other television projects. Rod has shared the stage with various well known musicians as a sideman. As a composer he has also released solo material, and was featured by Guitar Player Magazine, reviewing the title track of his Cosmic Playground instrumental album. As a teacher, Rod developed "Future of Music", an educational program which received praise and support from The United Way.

www.degeorgemusic.com

contributors

DOUG RAPPOPORT (AKA *DougE Rapps*)
Columnist/Pro Musician/Educator

Doug Rappoport has played guitar professionally since age 15 and has been playing lead guitar, touring internationally and recording as a member of the legendary Edgar Winter Band, for 10+ years. Doug has also composed for television, does a variety of session work including movie trailers, national-primetime commercials, and also did a stint as music director and composer for local Los Angeles talk show favorite, "The John Kerwin Show." As a faculty member of Hollywood's Musician's Institute/GIT, Doug teaches Private Lessons and Open Counseling. He is currently recording a solo follow-up to his 2008 debut album, BIONIC.

www.dougrappoport.com

RAÚL RODRIGUEZ
Columnist/Luthier

Raúl Rodriguez was born in Gijón a small town in the north of Spain. His father is a musician , so musical instruments and records where around and they caught his attention at early age. He studied music, guitar and bass, and after years of playing he developed an interest about guitar technology. He took woodworking courses, early music plucked instrument building courses, where he learned to build baroque guitar, vihuela and viola de gamba, and using books and videos he learned about guitar building and repair. During three years he worked at the Manuel Rodriguez workshop doing different processes on the buildindg of a classical and flamenco guitar. For a period of two years he has been collaborating with ISP magazine writing articles about different technical aspects of the guitar. Nowadays he is running his own guitar repair workshop, giving service to professional and amateur musicians.

www.rtgsur.com

MELZ DURSTON
Writer/Musician

Melz Durston is a British born Media and Creative Studies graduate & freelance writer who has also studied in Finland where she experienced a serious introduction to boutique guitar culture in covering Finnish luthiers for a Juha Ruokangas feature published by a UK based guitar magazine. She has also had work published with UK publications Q, the NME, a local newspaper and a Barcelona-based magazine. Currently working on her masters thesis, Melz has a myriad of interests & pursuits; too numerous to mention here— also at the risk of intimidating to our other/male contributors. Mostly, we love her writing style and the lively vibe she brings to GC.

JIM KATH
Columnist/Luthier

James Kath of Kath Custom Guitars has been a guitar player for 40 years, and has been teaching for the past 30. After high school he apprenticed for a master luthier in New Jersey for five years. Since then Jim has repaired, customized and built lots of great instruments and has met many interesting people. He's traveled, lived and worked in many places in the United States as well as South America. "There are great players everywhere and they all need a luthier now and then." Jim currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

www.kathguitars.com

Oliver Sin

Cover Artist

Oliver Sin is an Eastern-European contemporary painter. In his style are mixing Neo-expressionism, Street Art, Dadaism, Conceptual and Political Art together with science, as spices in a tasty French soup. He says that his only need is to have enough paint. If he doesn't have enough canvas, then he used to paint his scientific formulas on guitars, girlfriend's shoes etc. Just the lazy people need inspiration.

"My first memory with visual arts is from 1988, when I was about 3 years old and everybody in my family started to talk about my sister's talent in drawing. I wasn't talented, but I have never believed that talent exits, so I started to paint. But I had to experience many things in my life to realize that I instinctively gravitate towards the arts.

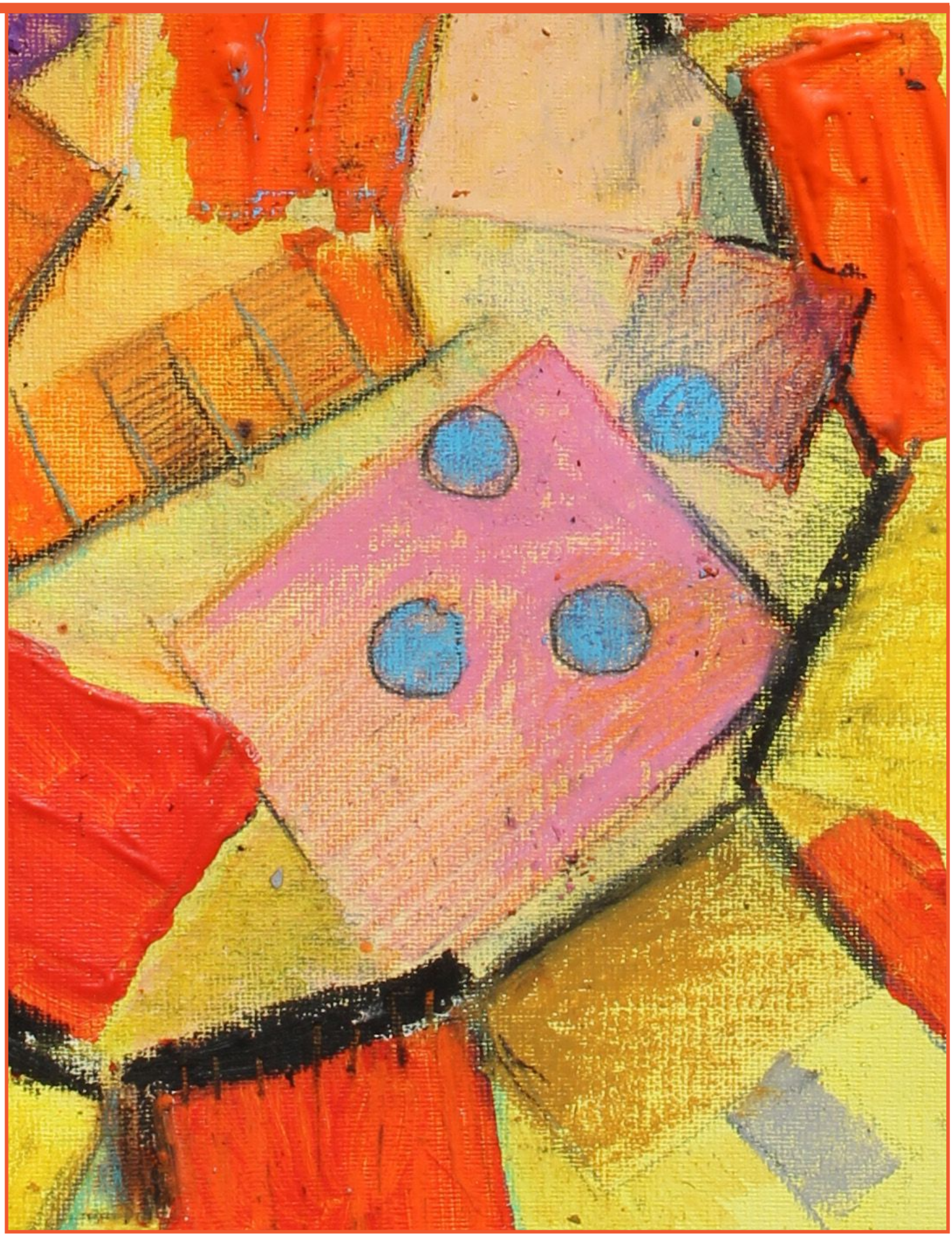
It is a great fortune that I'm loving it. I always try to live my life as honest as I can and I try to paint as less conscious as I can. I didn't choose this method, but that's the only way I can work. Hopefully it will bring some development.

Everybody has a unique perspective to sense and communicate. Mine is mostly comes from my musical heritage. It's like improvising in music, science and futurology are all parts of my style. Making art is the same as speaking, just using colors and shapes instead of sounds. Creating art is natural, if you practice it enough. The most themes I use on my works come to my mind subconsciously. When I start to paint the painting simply becomes a print of my subconscious beliefs, maybe political beliefs.

"I wouldn't say that I'm investigating science and future, I am just not interested in investigating past and history. One day maybe I will be the next Nostradamus.

Science and art search the answer to the same question. That answer excites me."

Oliver Sin Official Website: http://oliversin.eu



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Editor's Notes

Welcome to another edition of Guitar Connoisseur! I'll try to keep my notes short and sweet although there are a number of fresh changes ahead with Gc.

First, let me start with the theme of our "LP reboot" Issue.

Who does not love the Les Paul - single cut design? It's a staple in Rock 'n Roll, and probably one of the most recognizable instruments ever created. For this issue I decided to share some innovations from a few of my favorite luthiers: Juha Ruokangas, Timo Schramm, Tomi Korkalainen from Amfisound and Christian Hatstatt from Magneto Guitars.
All are luthiers who dare to step outside the box, offering alternatives to what's been done time and time again over the last 50 plus years. This issue is all about providing a comprehensive breakdown of what each luthier has accomplished thus far in working from and reinterpreting the iconic LP theme.

In this issue we decided to skip the usual interview format for a change, in favor of just letting each luthier share their design process in their own words. Each has a unique story and method of telling it, also reflecting each one's approach to guitar building, and the beautiful instruments we're so honored to present to you here.

Guitar Connoisseur in print?

When we launched one year ago, in this very editorial section, I said printing was a big maybe. Well, after numerous requests and demand for print, you can expect to find all of our quarterly issues in print by the end of the year.
So what does this mean in terms of our online content? Well, each new Guitar Connoisseur quarterly edition will start off as a free online feature, in complete form until the next new issue replaces it—at which point the older archive issue will become available to-order in deluxe, AD FREE, coffee table style print format to complement our elaborate photo spreads.
Ads are for the current online issue only. This is the best way we know to help ensure that independent luthiers can affordably take advantage of advertising with us. Utilizing ads in print versions wouldn't be cost effective for anyone.

The great news here is that our books look nice! That's right, these are not wimpy newsstand magazines. There are no staples or cheap paper-- they are perfect bound, library quality with a glossy hard paper cover; more in the category of "Book-azines" or coffee table book format. A "commercial-free" comprehensive set of insightful profiles, interviews and stunning guitar pictorials for you to enjoy in your most comfortable "kickin' it" chair with a favorite beverage!

So where can you purchase print Guitar Connoisseur?

Guitar Connoisseur can be purchased on amazon.com (worldwide) and Barnes and Noble. We also have magcloud.com selling a glossy version of the book along with a digital download for iPad. You can purchase the iPad version by itself as well.
With all that said, enjoy our LP Reboot issue! And I look forward to bringing you more out-of-the-box guitar features!

See ya in 90 days

Kelcey Alonzo
Editor in Chief, Guitar Connoisseur

Magneto Guitars

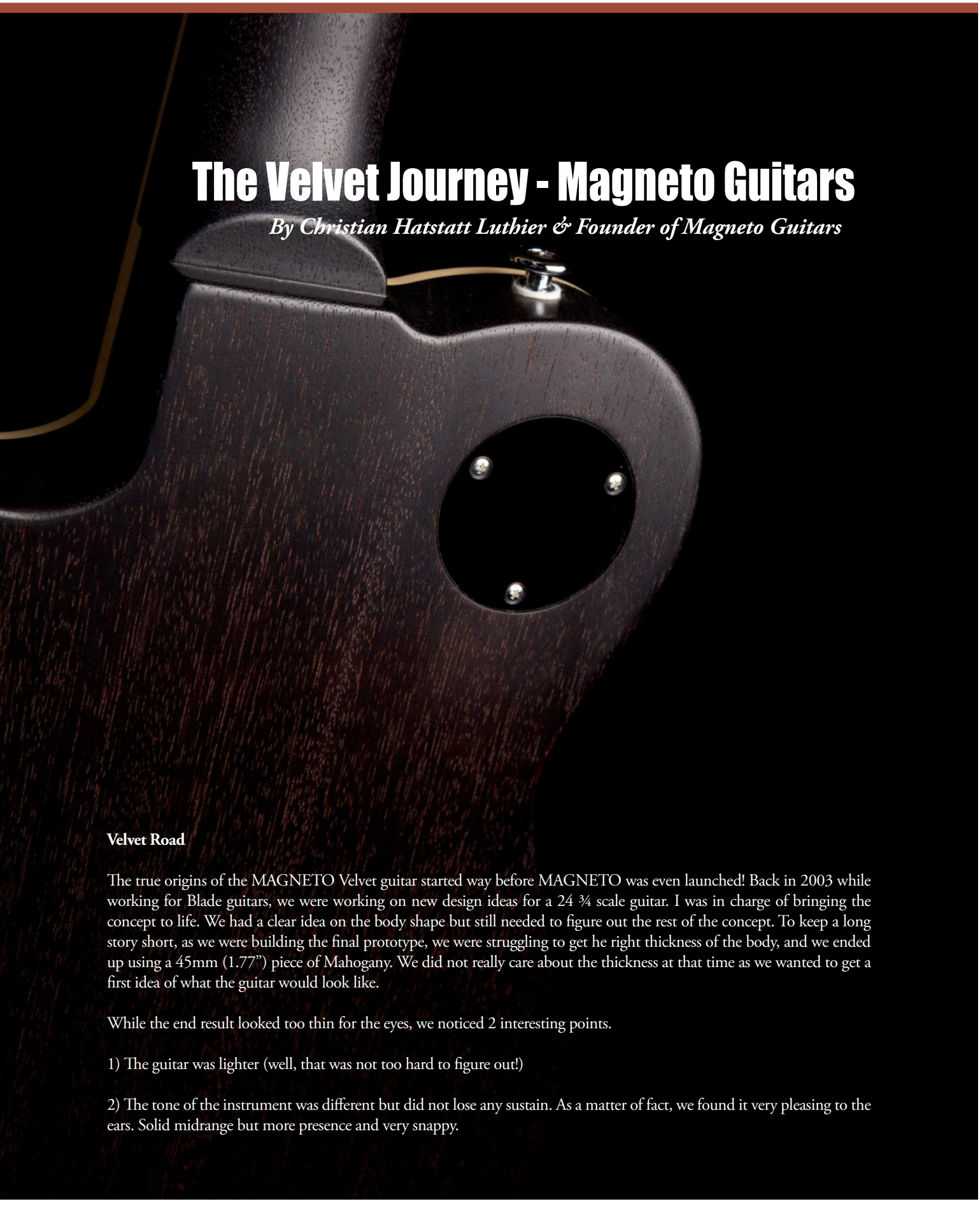
"Why did you do that? This means that anybody with a bandsaw can make a guitar!"

It is with these words that a famous competitor welcomed the newly launched LP back in 1952. The fact that a guitar brand started to make electric guitars in the form of a solid-body was not very welcome by the guitar industry, at a time when the arched-top hollow body guitar was the standard.

Some 60 years later, we see the solid body electric guitar phenomenon could not be stopped as it clearly served to define the sound of modern music from the 50s until these days. While on one hand the "bolt-on neck" solid body guitars started to gain popularity, the main alternative was the set-neck, 24 ¾ scale guitar that started off with P90 pickups and eventually became the typical 2-Humbucker guitar known as the "LP".

The LP is often described as the guitar with more sustain, midrange and excellent behavior when played with overdriven amps, which is true. However, the original idea was not necessarily to make it an iconic instrument for Rock'n Roll, as most musicians from the era played the instrument through clean sounding amps with very little effects in order to obtain classic and warm Jazz tones. Yes we have to face it; the Humbucker was created to overcome the hum problems which came with the P90 and all single coil pickups.

While there is some truth in the first sentence of this article, that the birth of the solid body electric guitar also marked the beginning of mass production, the past decades have seen various luthiers from all over the world continuing to build LP-type or influenced guitars with a lot of attention to details that brings a whole new life intothe original concept.



The Velvet Journey - Magneto Guitars

By Christian Hatstatt Luthier & Founder of Magneto Guitars

Velvet Road

The true origins of the MAGNETO Velvet guitar started way before MAGNETO was even launched! Back in 2003 while working for Blade guitars, we were working on new design ideas for a 24 ¾ scale guitar. I was in charge of bringing the concept to life. We had a clear idea on the body shape but still needed to figure out the rest of the concept. To keep a long story short, as we were building the final prototype, we were struggling to get he right thickness of the body, and we ended up using a 45mm (1.77") piece of Mahogany. We did not really care about the thickness at that time as we wanted to get a first idea of what the guitar would look like.

While the end result looked too thin for the eyes, we noticed 2 interesting points.

1) The guitar was lighter (well, that was not too hard to figure out!)

2) The tone of the instrument was different but did not lose any sustain. As a matter of fact, we found it very pleasing to the ears. Solid midrange but more presence and very snappy.

Velvet sporting some retro modern appointments

After this first prototype, the weight and thickness were changed. However the end result of this first prototype impressed me so much that I decided I would follow up on these ideas whenever I had a chance to.

After starting the first designs for MAGNETO Guitars in 2008, I knew that I wanted a 24 ¾ scale, set-neck guitar as a third model of the MAGNETO range. The influence of the thinner body and the prototype work done in 2003 served as a reference for the new Velvet guitar.

So, here we are, but what's the real idea behind the Velvet? Well to be honest, it is not part of our philosophy to just copy a standard. You can sure build one to perfection, but that would not be enough reason to make a new guitar model these days.

Reason #1: To stay true to the MAGNETO Philosophy in terms of tone, design and integrity in build.

There is a second reason though. Truth is that during my years as a musician I could never feel 100% good when playing a real LP guitar. It has to do with many factors: habit, neck shape, weight, too much midrange etc., etc…

So the answers are here: Let us create an instrument with a more C shaped neck and a lighter weight. Let us also try to make it more snappy in tone with a bit higher midrange and quack, to make it interesting when played in clean mode.

All these points would make it easier to switch from a Strat or Tele style guitar to a 2 HB guitar.

Now that we have defined the rules, time to work on the shape, on the body curves, the body mass, the neck mass, the headstock shape & mass. All these parameters interact and influence each other in a complex way.

Theories & Practice

While you probably expected that we start exploring the body, we intentionally started to talk about the neck in order to explain its influence on the overall tone.

The neck has a massive impact both on the sound and the feeling you have when playing the guitar. In other terms, the neck woods will produce intense vibrations.

You can experience this by simply playing the open strings on your guitar: Simply by feeling with your fingers you will feel way more vibrations coming from the neck area than on the body. Something we rarely do is touch the headstock

Closeup of Velvet oil finish

during the string vibrations, where you will feel even more resonance. It is an obvious fact that the impact of the neck & headstock on the overall tone of a solid-body electric guitar is quite important. So, we will basically start with one massive piece of carefully selected and well seasoned mahogany.

Another aspect of this new guitar will be the headstock: first, it will have 3 tuners per side and will have a 17° angle to the fingerboard to ensure great string pressure on the nut resulting in greater vibration. Nothing new here as this had already been done on vintage guitars and proved to work the best for the tones we wanted to achieve. The headstock will receive a thin ebony cap in which the Magneto logo and the 3 Velvet stripes will be inlayed using mother-of-pearl material.

Right on the other end, the bare neck will have a long tail that will be shaped to fit very tightly into the body where it will be solidly glued. It is called a set-in neck, and we will use a very traditional mortise and tenon joint. The goal is to connect body and neck in such a fashion so it becomes one single and tight unit.

Mass? Yes, mass is important but you do not want a neck to be too fat, just fair sized so it feels good to play. And the mass of the neck has to be in a certain balance to the body mass in order to reach the tones we are after. Also, we wanted he neck to feel comfortable for the typical start player so we used a typical C profile.

The fretboard is that other part of the guitar which has a major impact on the overall tone of your solid-body guitar. It is very easy to notice the tonal colors of rosewood versus maple or ebony. Our favorite fretboard wood is rosewood, East Indian rosewood, in our specific case.

Our new guitar will have block inlays, and its construction will require that we install the inlays and prepare the fret-slots prior to the installation of the fingerboard to the neck. As for all our guitars we will go for our beloved 280mm (11 Inch) radius which will receive jumbo frets (6120 style 18% NS).

Velvet Body

So we finally made it to talk about the body of our new guitar. For the specific tone we wanted to achieve, we decided to go for a 1-piece mahogany with a 2-piece maple top. The depth of the mahogany combined to the high midrange flavor of the maple top will give it that focused and tight tone.

Well, here again, the wood combinations are nothing new, and we chose them specifically for their tonal characteristics. However, what is new on such a guitar type is a slightly thinner and lighter body that would enhance the overall midrange response, which is part of our signature tone. This is something we have already achieved on our Sonnet and T-Wave guitars.

The body will receive a nice cream top binding as will the fingerboard. The back of the body will have a 4mm radius edge.

After all that is done, we can start to route the neck pocket which is an important

Photo: Left and right pages by Michael Edmonds: Eric Gales performing with his Velvet at BB Kings in NYC

moment as it requires precision and respect of the center line. At the same time, we will do all routings on the back of the body for the electronic cavities.

We've reached the point where the neck is being joined to the body and it is a fact that the character of each part will influence the other in the complex transmission of vibrations. Just like humans; when a team of people have an overall positive influence on each other!

What about weight? Well so far we designed the guitar to avoid any kind of chambering in order to tweak the weight which also has an influence on tone, and we wanted to avoid that. So we are looking to have an instrument around or below the 4 kgs (8lb & 13 oz). Yet it still needs to be balanced when strapped around the body in order to keep the neck in the air. This was also taken care of during design, hence a special design of the body where we have put a bit more mass on the bottom of the guitar.

While we like to use nitrocellulose or urethane finishes on most of our guitars, in this particular case we wanted to go for a different finish with a more distressed feeling, without trying to make it look "used". We chose a special oil-wax finish with a black tint. This finish takes up quite some time and energy to apply.

The Sum of Parts

There is a fascination about parts and features. Are they really that important? Yes, in the sense that every single part on a guitar has an influence-- but we believe that the most important thing is the quality of the construction. At the end of the day, the instrument has to inspire the musician to play new music.
That being said, we like to go for the best when it comes to parts. As an example, we use bridges and tuners that are custom made by Gotoh for the quality of their engineering and reliability. Oiled cow bone is used for the nuts. All these parts play an important role in transmission of vibrations to the woods. The capture of the string vibrations will be achieved by using 2 Lollar Imperial pickups.

Time to try it and play the first notes through an amp. Always a special moment! Tight midrange and quite fat; less boomy and a bit hollower than what an LP would be. A tad closer to the SG tone, certainly due to the slightly thinner body, but plenty of sustain. When played clean, the guitar keeps a snappy attack and some kinda vintage "twang" if I may use this word for a guitar like this. The Lollar Imperials do a perfect job-- beautifully balanced with nice overtones.

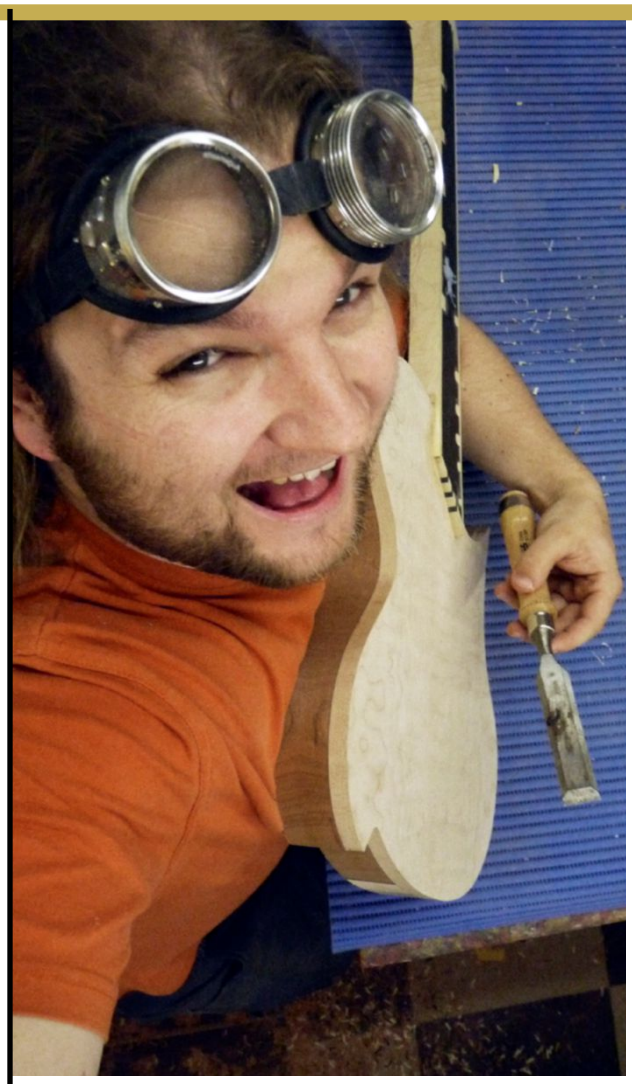
Magneto Guitars

Magneto Guitars

Magneto Guitars

Well these are at least our first impressions. Of course this "New-Tone Land" needs to be explored by the musicians who will create their music and their own signature tone by playing the Velvet!

TS Customs



Editor's Intro: The following feature was translated from German with minimal English grammar reconstruction in order to preserve Timo Schramm's passion, and Guitar Connoisseur's international vibe.

As revealed in the photos, Schramm's work speaks for itself. In spite of his young age and short time as a luthier, his designs and exquisite detail convey a craft savvy old soul.

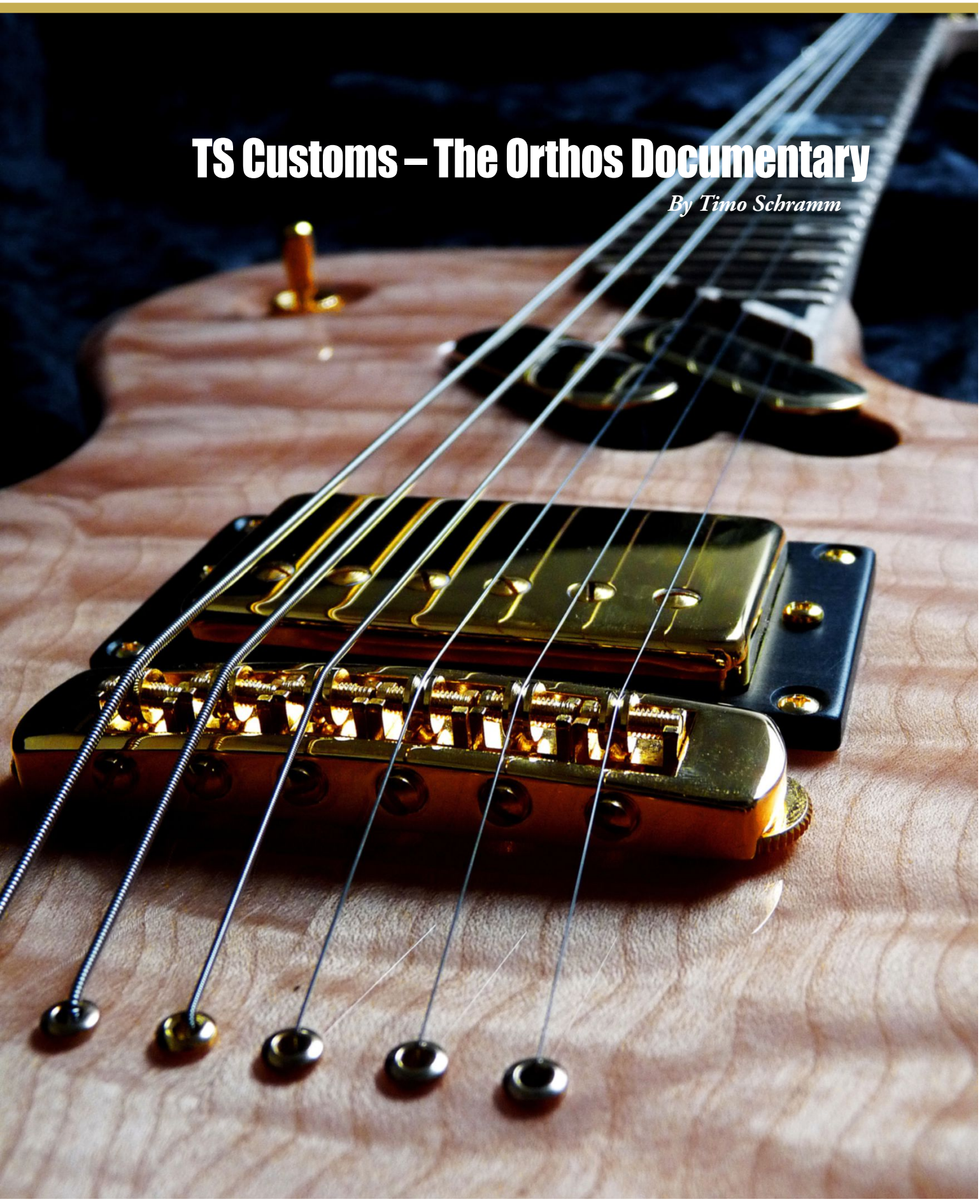
Timo has already learned some tough lessons about the business, having built a guitar unknowingly for a major Rock star guitarist. An unscrupulous character gave the borrowed instrument to Metallica's Kirk Hammett; omitting recognition to its builder.

Shortly thereafter, upon attending a Metallica concert, Schramm had the surreal experience of seeing his work onstage, and Hammett obviously digging it—although sadly, the luthier himself was out of the loop. But this event inspired an even stronger devotion to the craft.

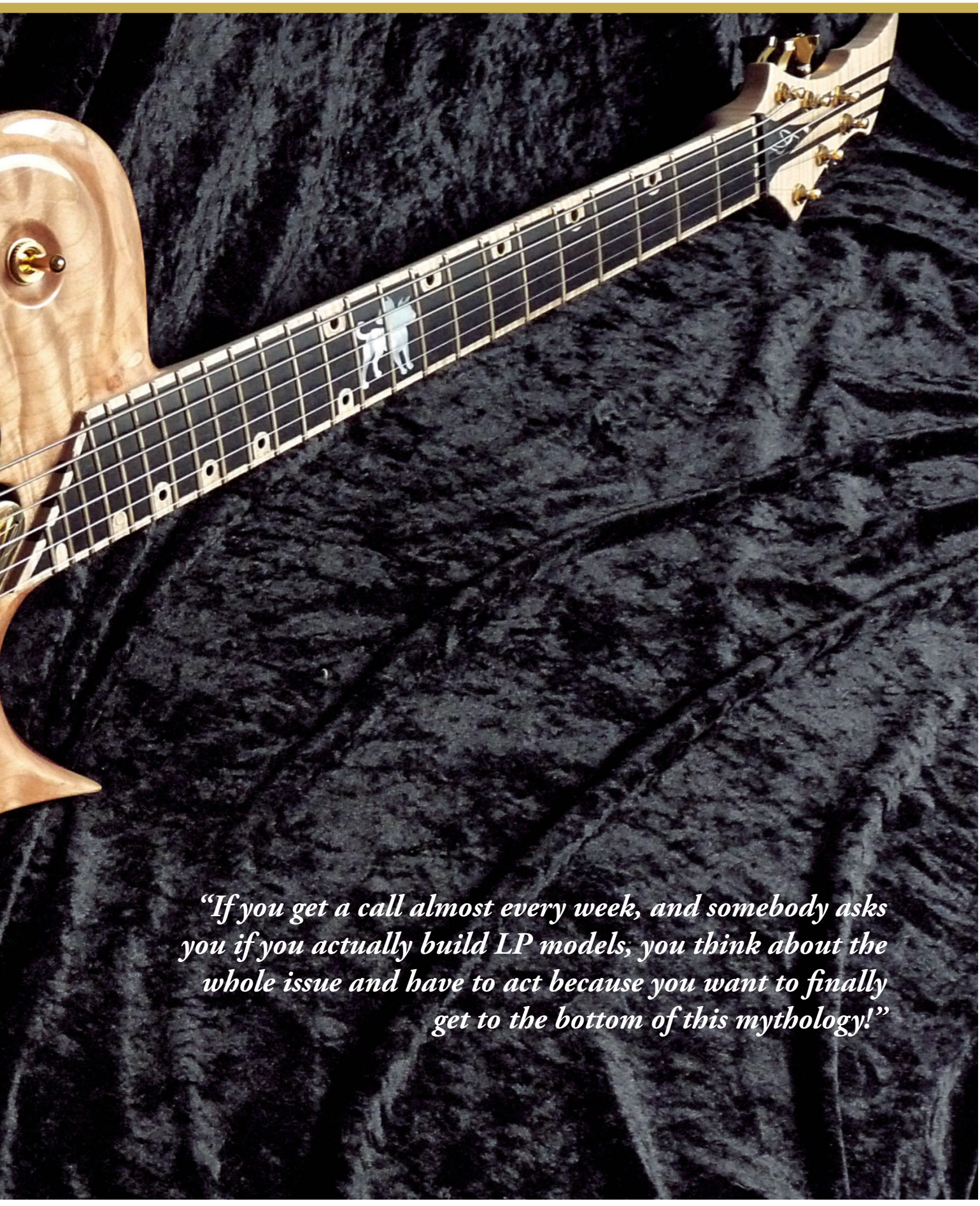
Orthos is Schramm's latest guitar design. Still based on the classic LP profile, Orthos takes this platform into bold new areas, all the while maintaining traditional aesthetics and plenty of class.

TS Customs – The Orthos Documentary

By Timo Schramm



TS Customs



"If you get a call almost every week, and somebody asks you if you actually build LP models, you think about the whole issue and have to act because you want to finally get to the bottom of this mythology!"

TS Customs

Kirk Hammet with TS customs built Death Magnetic guitar

the story

Founded in 2007, the German luthier Timo Schramm already celebrates the fifth anniversary with his custom guitar brand TS Customs. By dissatisfaction with conventional guitars off the rack, and the talent to give things a form, at 25 years old, the guitar freak and skilled modeler started in 2009 with TS Customs properly through after he tailored a guitar to Mr. Kirk Hammett of Metallica himself and this without his knowledge about.

When Kirk Hammett spontaneously played this guitar live in front of more than 11,000 spectators in Hamburg, it was clear that the guitar would be a part of Timo Schramm's life.

"When Kirk finally came on stage with the guitar and a big grin on face, and played the first few notes of the song 'killing time', I felt like my knees went weak ... I do not know how to describe this feeling ... it was definitely one of the strongest so far! "

Buoyed by this incredible feeling of success and the consequent will to establish on the custom guitar market, TS Customs moves strongly forward. Guitar models with plenty of brand recognition would be developed according to the customer, and built in loving hand-work.

The constituency is growing, and there are more and more endorsers of local bands as TS Customs clients. Above all, the extravagant forms and the related innovative ideas of the models Minotaurus, Orthos, Greif and Bassilisk show the unmistakable signature of the young German. The link between form and functionality is clearly in the foreground here, and one can only imagine what energies

Death Magnetic about to go to Kirk Hammet

are hidden behind the guitars.

"I know that every guitarist has at least one dream instrument in mind they carry around ... you just have to tell me those dreams!"

the Orthos history – "the two headed dog"

The idea behind the TS Customs Orthos has surely been a reference to the more traditional guitar market; guitars which establish in the past and of course still play a very formative and influential role in the guitar world today. Guitars are still very much oriented as some living legends influence it, especially in determining HOW and WHICH guitar you really play.

"If you get a call almost every week, and somebody asks you if you actually build LP models, you think about the whole issue and have to act because you want to finally get to the bottom of this mythology!"

TS Customs models such as Jade, Minotaurus and Greif are already very daring and new designs. So in winter 2011, Timo made the decision to develop a guitar that unites the needs of both worlds; primarily for more traditional players, but also those with modern standards, and without losing the TS Customs signature. Result: A guitar with strong attributes that perhaps could also fascinate these traditional players.

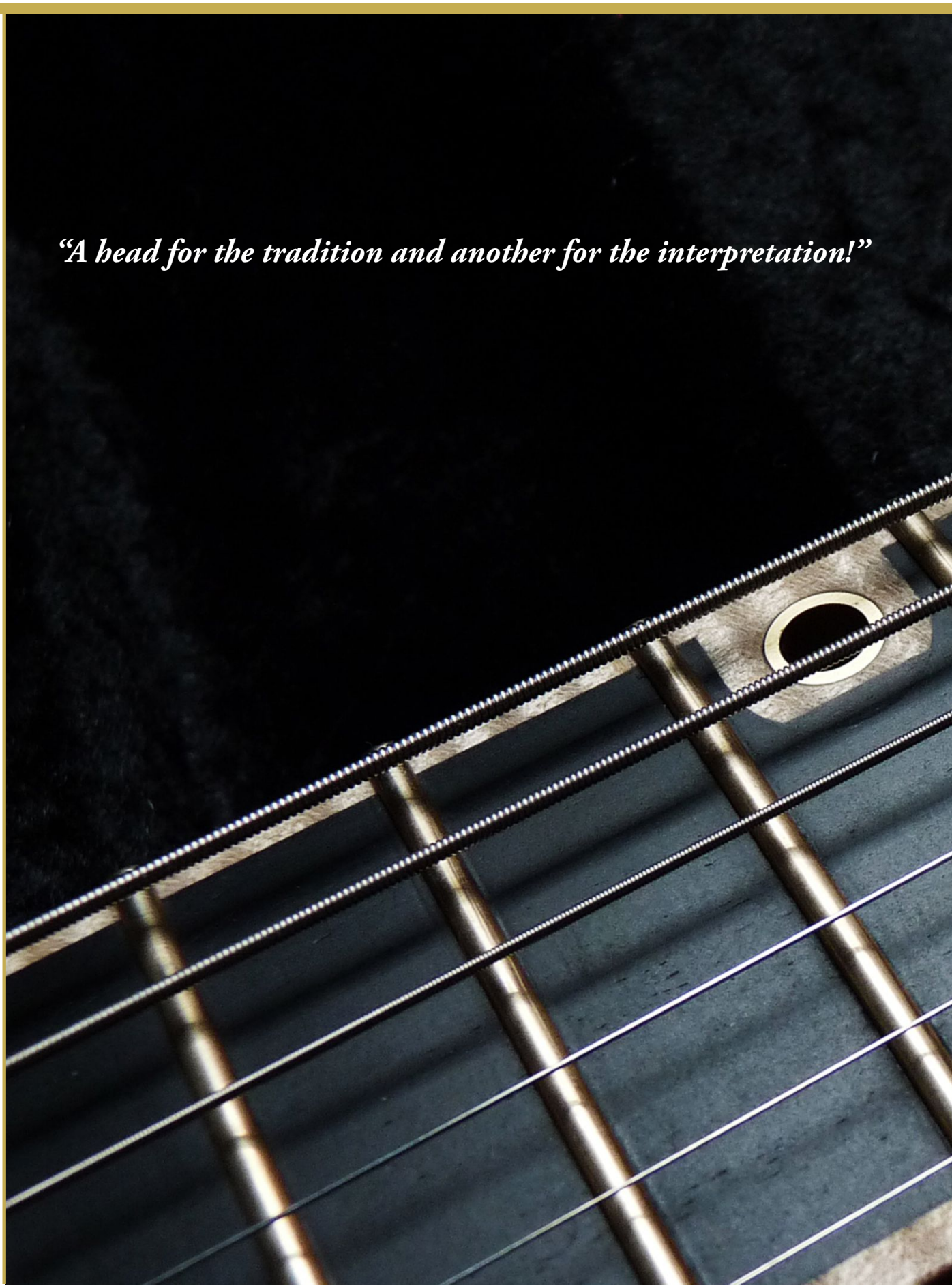
"One evening I was sitting at my desk, and drew lines in thought to myself ... then time finally fell into place and everything worked properly! The Orthos was born!"

So what is behind the name Orthos? The Orthos is the two-headed watchdog from Greek mythology. As for nearly all TS Customs models, a mythological name for the new project guitar requirement makes even broader sense.

"A head for the tradition and another for the interpretation!"

TS Customs

"A head for the tradition and another for the interpretation!"



Timo Sanding Neck

the design

The Orthos is distinguished by its extravagant design and styling as well as the own rock and traditional character. It is a combination of logical lines and curves which were composed and finished in Timo's mind over time, as are all TS Custom models.

"When I start to build a guitar, I can rotate the model there as in a computer program, and look at myself in all views ... with time you learn to go into detail in the head so as to exclude problems early!"

Orthos also derives from the aggressive form of the Minotaurus model; based on its highlights. The focus is clearly the loose swing of surface shaping which combines almost all the components of the guitar. If you catch the guitar in mind, you are always in the pursuit of this swing. Bold looks throughout the different layers of the low edge of the top are obtained by various shaping methods.

The entire body, front and back, incorporate a very large radius to provide for a more ergonomic feel. Also, the cut-away is very much cut, and guarantees best playing comfort at higher frets when soloing. The toggle switch, sitting in its usual place, was smoothly integrated with the top.

the body mass index

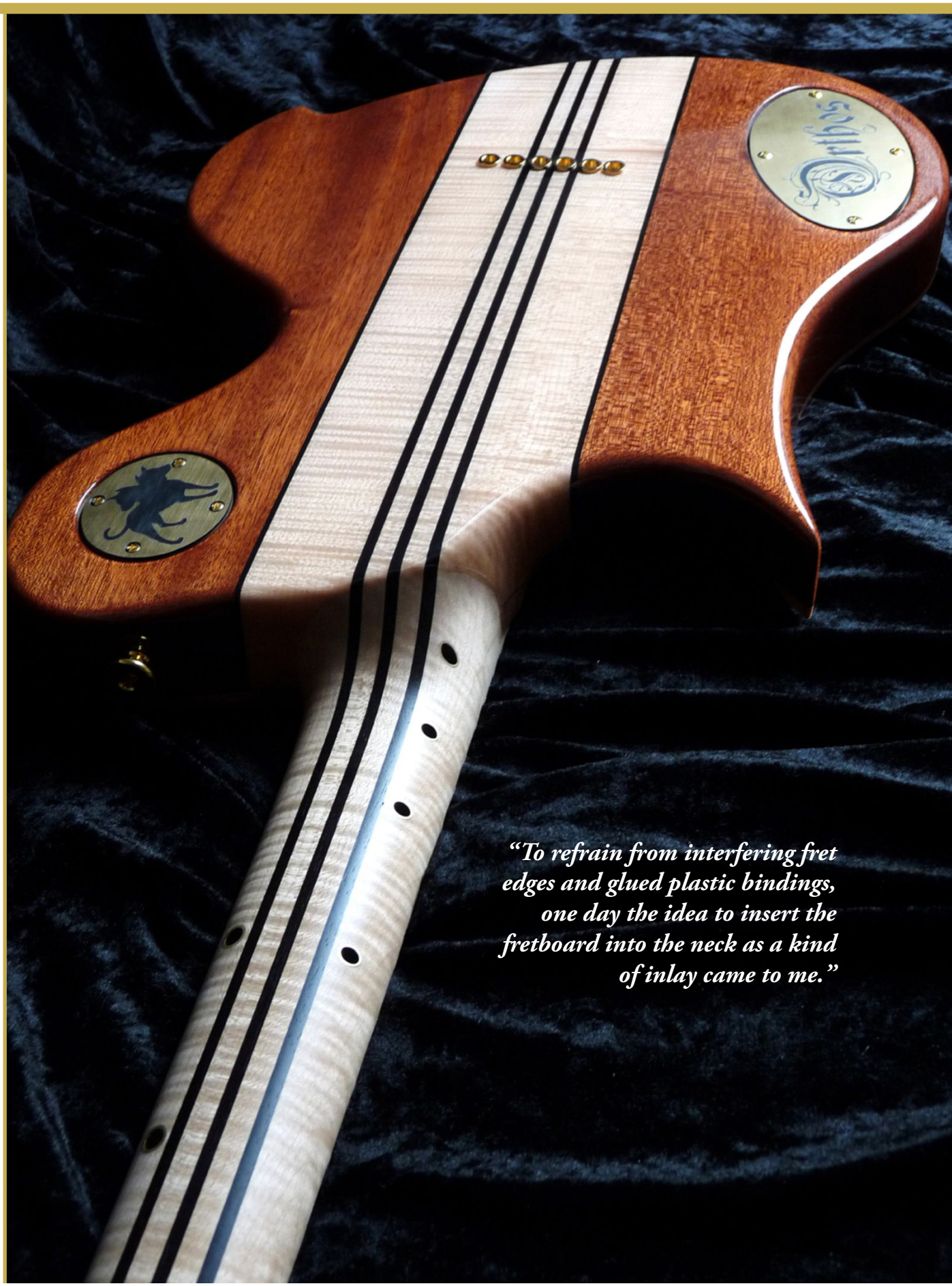
The body of the Orthos is primarily a sandwich construction of different woods. An optional thin wood veneer between primary top and body woods is also a nice addition. It borders top and body once more from each other and thus raises both out.

Despite of the visual advantages of this design future Orthos Projects are also planned in which the body is painted opaque, and should be made out of one type of wood. The Orthos is designed for both variations. Thanks to the relief-like surface contours revealing such heavy contrasts, the top will always, certainly remain a highlight of the Orthos.

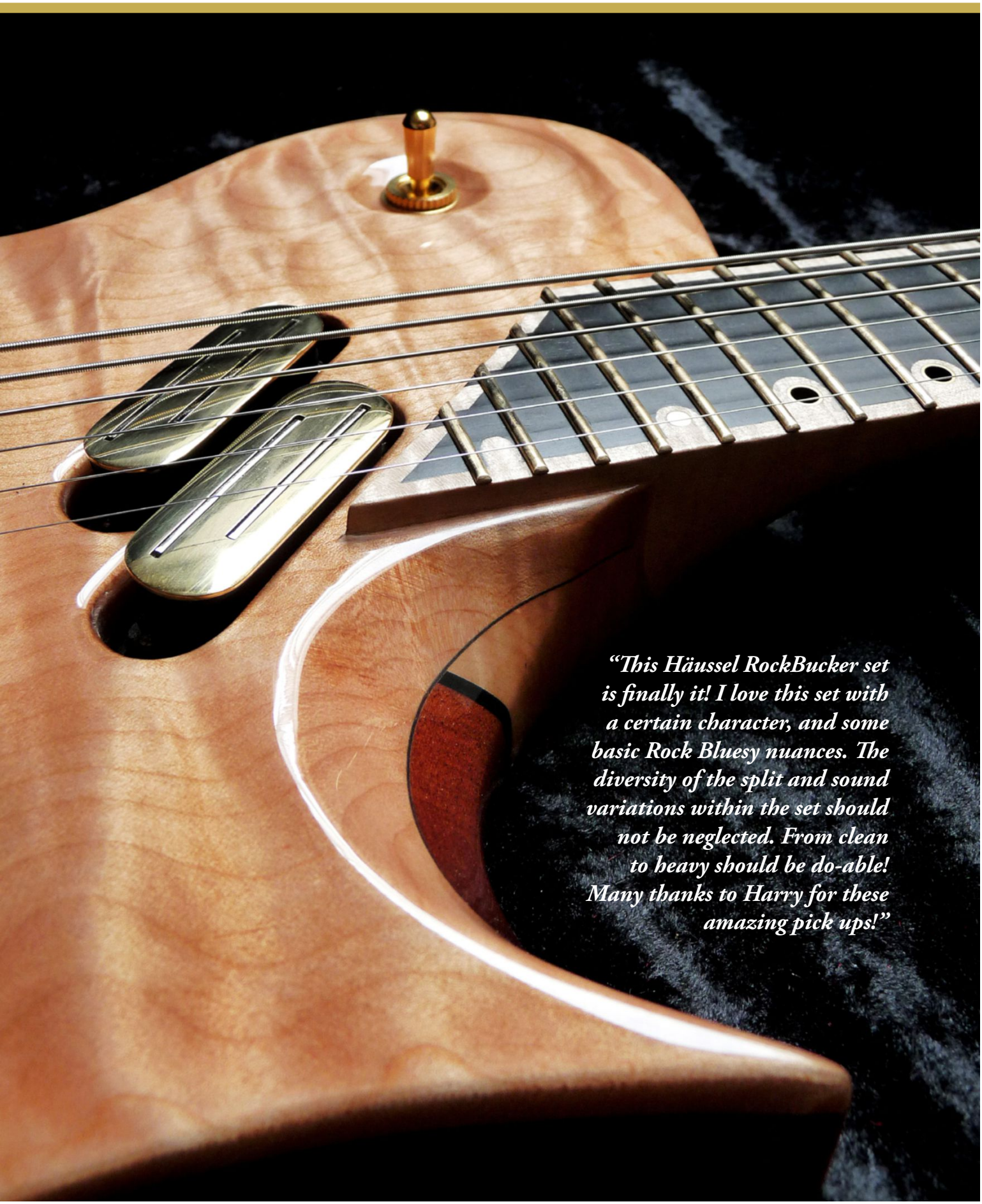
The body thickness can be varied according to taste, of course. Generally it is stronger than other TS Customs models, comparing more to the thicker bodies of traditional guitars.

The neck can be either bolt-on or through body, depending

TS Customs



"To refrain from interfering fret edges and glued plastic bindings, one day the idea to insert the fretboard into the neck as a kind of inlay came to me."



"This Häussel RockBucker set is finally it! I love this set with a certain character, and some basic Rock Bluesy nuances. The diversity of the split and sound variations within the set should not be neglected. From clean to heavy should be do-able! Many thanks to Harry for these amazing pick ups!"

TS Customs

"I'll take every guitar project in future as a challenge to myself! I will continue to develop high quality custom shop guitars, made In Germany!"

TS Customs

"When I start to build a guitar, I can rotate the model there as in a computer program, and look at myself in all views ... with time you learn to go into detail in the head so as to exclude problems early!"

on the preference of the player in terms of optimized attack and sustain.

new fretboard neck, new concept, new feel

Another highlight of the Orthos, and in the global market-- a real innovation, is the "TS fretboard inlay". The meaning and function behind it are easily explained:

"To refrain from interfering fret edges and glued plastic bindings, one day the idea to insert the fretboard into the neck as a kind of inlay came to me."

The neck has thus, from the point of view of the player, a totally homogenous appearance, and is completely free of any visible glue joints, sharp fret edges and ugly cut-slots. This of course, means the possibility to fit in the fretboard, depending on individual customer requirements. In the Orthos prototype "Chromolive", custom aluminum "Dot-pipes" (see note below) were inserted into the fretboard.

Ed note: "Dot-pipes" refer to open/see-thru/ ferrule-style position markers extending through top of fretboard to back of neck. Refer to close-up photos of fretboard.

sound and character

The RockBucker pickup set is a product made specifically for TS Customs and Orthos by the German manufacturer, Harry Häussel.

"This Häussel RockBucker set is finally it! I love this set with a certain character, and some basic Rock Bluesy nuances. The diversity of the split and sound variations within the set should not be neglected. From clean to heavy should be do-able! Many thanks to Harry for these amazing pick ups!"

To exactly create Timo's wishes of an earthy and full rock sounding pickup set, Harry wound the "RockBucker" especially for TS Customs. The neck pickup is split in two, and not only for aesthetic reasons. Again, you can argue back and forth on the ambiguity of the term

''Function meets design". The background is that most neck pickups are too muddy in the bass and undefined sounding as they are just positioned very close to the end of the fingerboard. The Skirt Bucker PU now utilizes its split and angle to decrease the bass strings a little to the rear which provides tremendous visibility. Consequently on the higher strings it is the usual flowing sound.

The bass strings can be played well defined and clear. From a design-point, the neck pickup fits naturally the angle concept of the Orthos.

"I love things linking together logically! The neck pickup of Orthos clearly shows what I mean... The shape pretends what may be included in the technique. Experimented to develop a lot creates completely new approaches such as the approach of the RockBucker set." **Ed Note:** The previous quote was very difficult to translate, so just roll with it. Sorry.

The bridge pickup is pure Rock & Roll! It can play very heavy riffs, but also traditional ways of playing. There are a truly unbelievable amount of sound nuances because of the split pot and toggle switch.

the future

The TS Customs Orthos has only been available for a few months, and already there are signs of success. Three other model orders for 2013 have already been received, and the number is increasing.

Moreover, a small Orthos fan base has been formed. Almost every day, Timo Schramm gets congratulations and inquiries from interested guitarists. The model seems to reach his goal.

But Timo went a step further:

He recently built a model based on Orthos, but with a hollow body construction, single coils, a completely scalloped fingerboard and recessed headstock-cover. So it is exactly this stuff that was pointing in the other traditional corner. Were there not two camps? It shows even more the great variability of this type of guitar. We can only wait with excitement what comes next from TS Customs. It certainly will not be standard!

"I'll take every guitar project in future as a challenge to myself! I will continue to develop high quality custom shop guitars, made In Germany!"

www.tscustoms.de

Amfisound

I built my first Les Paul style guitar in 1997-1998. And to be honest, I never liked the original LP style that much for the type of music I wanted to use it for. My first LP was basically a copy of the original.

And right after I had finished it, I started to think that with some changes, this can be improved into a much better guitar; especially for more contemporary music genres and the technical requirements that go with it.

Compared with soloist style guitars, I found the LP always too heavy and nearly impossible to get good balance and full playability with. Moreover, it is somewhat inflexible in the sense that it cannot be played in a lot of different music styles.

This is perhaps not surprising because, of course, a lot of the music genres of today
didn't exist back in the 50's when the LP first came into production.

Another issue I have had was with the neck joint and the 22 frets, which, in my opinion and experience, don't suit certain modern music styles at all. But the one thing which I really loved about the original model was the shape. It has the beautiful classic guitar shape with a touch of violin in it

Amfisound's Halti Model – Classic Look with Twists for the Modern Soloist

(The perspectives of a young European guitar builder on starting a company and revising on a classic design for extreme playing.)

By Tomi Korkalainen – Luthier & Founder of Amfisound Guitars, Finland.

Amfisound

"the easiest way would have been to make it a neck-thru, but easier isn't always better"

Tomi finishing up the bindings on a white Halti

Especially custom guitars for more extreme or underground styles that were rarely seen, and I felt that this was something I wanted to change. The result was the birth of Amfisound in 2002, which I and my friend Sampo started completely from scratch.

When you start a company from scratch, you have to compromise a lot to get the business running in the first place, but in spite of that we stuck to our vision of improving and developing guitars for more extreme music styles, such as metal, which didn't get much respect in those times. Back then, the general opinion was that metal was just "noise", and didn't require exact technical skills or perfect guitars... Well, this is one of the greatest misconceptions of all time!

I felt that there was not only a niche in the market there, but that changing this view, and developing great guitars for more extreme styles was something that really needed to be done. Besides, such music has always been close to my heart, so it came very natural to me, and I put all my passion into advancing the improvements I envisioned.

After Amfisound was founded, we did not step away from the LP model as one might expect considering my musical interests and our general direction. We built LP models from the very start, with our own headstock. However, since our customers were mainly metal oriented, it didn't take us very long to see that more changes were truly wanted for the needs of these young musicians.

So we started to offer LP style guitars with some twists and changes that better suited their playing styles. The early 2000's were also a time by which low tunings had become very popular in heavy metal music. Another demand was for baritone scale with thicker strings.

All these things started to grow and combine into further ideas for improvement. During that time, I came up with some new options which suited our trademark better. One of the most important of these was the Archdrop top contour, which, in the way we built it, hadn't existed in archtop guitars before.

Other options were the 25.5" scale and 24 jumbo frets in order to get more tuning possibilities for this type of guitar. We also changed the neck joint so that it is glued as a full-neck "plank" unlike the typical LP joint.

Amfisound

Photo Credit: **Larry Melton**

Amfisound

We rounded the neck joint to get better access to the highest frets. But since we still wanted to keep the joint at the 16th fret, the rounded neck joint wasn't enough. As everyone knows, a standard neck joint, even with a long tenon, doesn't change the playability at the highest frets, especially if there are 24 of them you want to reach easily. So I had to come up with a better solution.

I often say that I am a big fan of neck-thru guitars; they just have something- the sound, the stability - it's one package full of energy! Nonetheless, I wanted to keep this LP style guitar as a set-neck guitar. Of course, the easiest way would have been to make it a neck-thru, but easier isn't always better. The construction and shape of a guitar has always been the most important thing in our company! Since we're adapting it to today's music standards, gluing cool woods together and yet using the same old standards just simply won't do.

When my company-mate Sampo, who is specialized in bass guitars, showed me some pictures of unconventional and, at first glance, weird-looking bass creations and their neck joints, the ideas I have always had in my head suddenly formed into a clear image. Inspired by various bass neck joints, and combining some of these elements with my own ideas, I designed a completely new neck joint and named it SET-LOCK. This neck joint doesn't feature the typical heel at all; it's shape actually resembles a super-fast neck-thru guitar. The inside joint looks like a puzzle piece, which is very effective in making the neck and the body "grow" together by creating one full guitar plank.

This is something which hasn't been seen in this type of guitar before. The fact that the "puzzle piece" is under the pickup, thus not visible, says a lot about our philosophy and the way we design our guitars. Namely, that everything is designed first and foremost for a functional reason with perfect construction and shape. But it also looks aesthetically good and feels smooth.

One of the best things about this "base plank"/SET-LOCK is that we can use it for different kinds of guitars and different kinds of players. We have always been known as a custom shop that makes mainly heavy metal guitars, which is not quite correct because we have always made guitars and basses for more traditional music styles as well. But especially in recent years, and after having created quite a few Amfisound metal models, we have wanted to broaden our base and use the skills and experience we've acquired over the years to create not only better guitars for metal players but also for modern rock, jazz, blues, and any kind of contemporary music. With our improved LP-style guitar, we created a model that does just that.

We named this model "Halti," after Finland's highest mountain, and officially introduced it in 2011 at the Musikmesse (music gear trade show) in Frankfurt, Germany.

As just mentioned, the biggest motivating factor in creating a single cutaway LP-type guitar was that we wanted to make a perfect LP model for younger and new-generation musicians. Ever since I started building guitars, I have asked myself why everyone should follow the old construction standards, when, in fact, they don't go well together anymore with today's musical demands.

In this case, I had only one mission: to put together a classic LP-style guitar with modern soloist-style options, which features a 25,5" scale and 24 frets. I wanted it to retain its beautiful classic shape and look, but upgrade it for today's generation, and with its modern soloist-style playability and versatility, the Halti model sets a completely new standard for the modern rock guitar. What is perhaps best about it, for players used to the original, is that you can easily go from a standard LP to the Halti.

Amfisound

Amfisound's SET-LOCK innovation

Here, a summary of its features:

The Amfisound Halti features a SET-LOCK construction, with a long and lockable neck joint, a 25.5" scale, and 24 frets. This new super-stable and revolutionarily-shaped neck joint makes the model feel like a super-fast soloist guitar.

The basic model features a mahogany body and neck. The fingerboard is made of rosewood, and the top is maple. As everybody can see, we have kept the basic construction really classic and simple.

We build the Halti in two basic categories: the Standard line and the Master line. As in all our models, the Halti is available with plenty of custom options, such as korina body, maple neck, ebony fingerboard, and many hand-picked top wood options-- like figured maple, figured poplar, figured birch, and more.

There are also many hardware and bridge options available. Pickup variations come from Lundgren and Bare Knuckle Pickups. As for visual options, this aspect is totally up to the wishes of our customers. Over the years, we have done some extremely different and graphic guitars which included, for example, beautiful woods with different shapes, 3D-carvings, paintings; from frozen patterns to realistic flames, and much more.

That makes our work not only unique, but also really interesting, motivating, and inspiring for us. Every guitar we make feels very personal and special to us. These things are very important for us, because, as every custom guitar builder knows, this is not an easy business; it's a life-long commitment based on a deep personal passion.

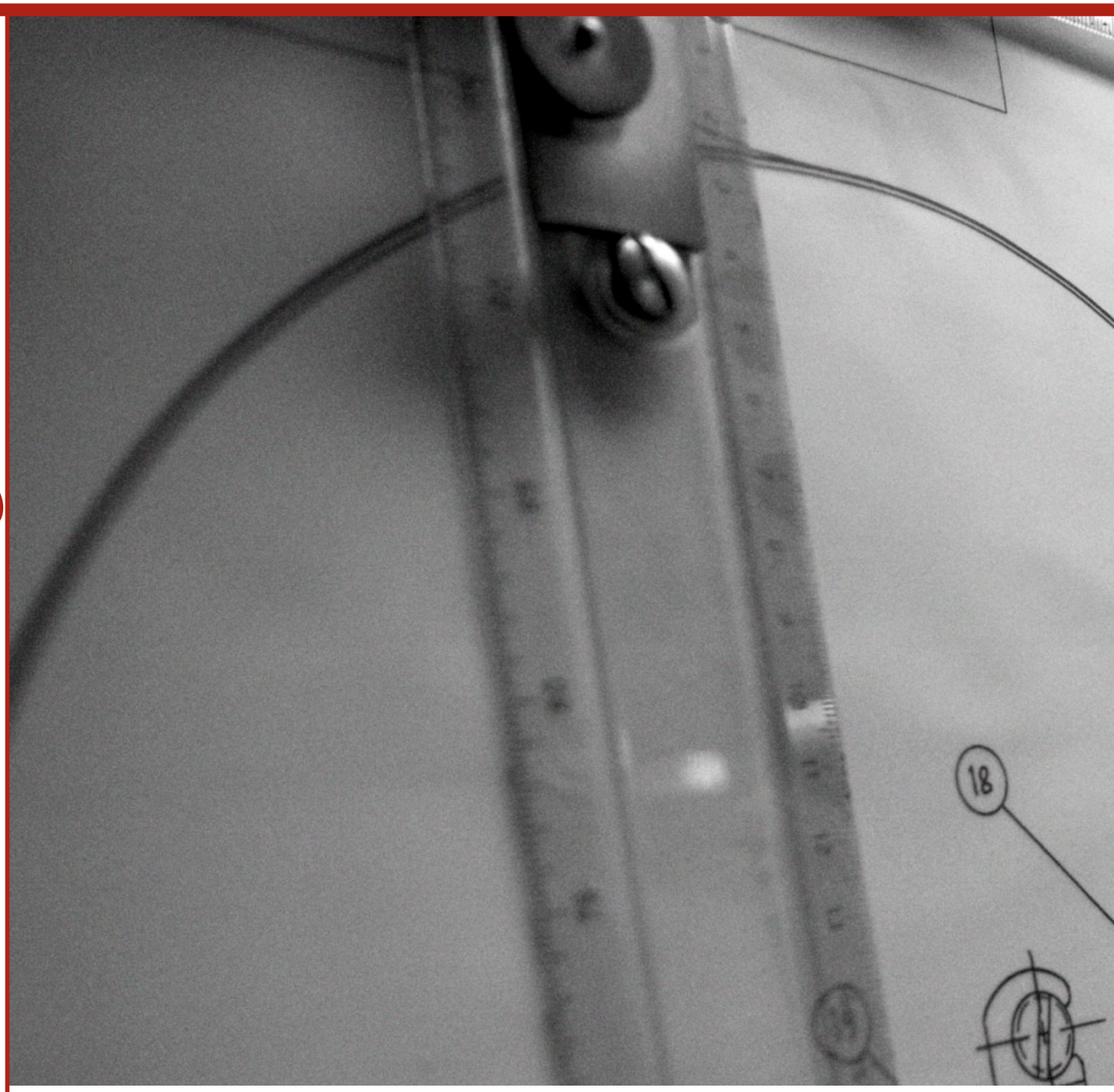
"Still remember that late Friday winter evening, as many times before on a Friday, I was shaping the guitar to get it done in time..."

Ruokangas Guitars

The Unicorn

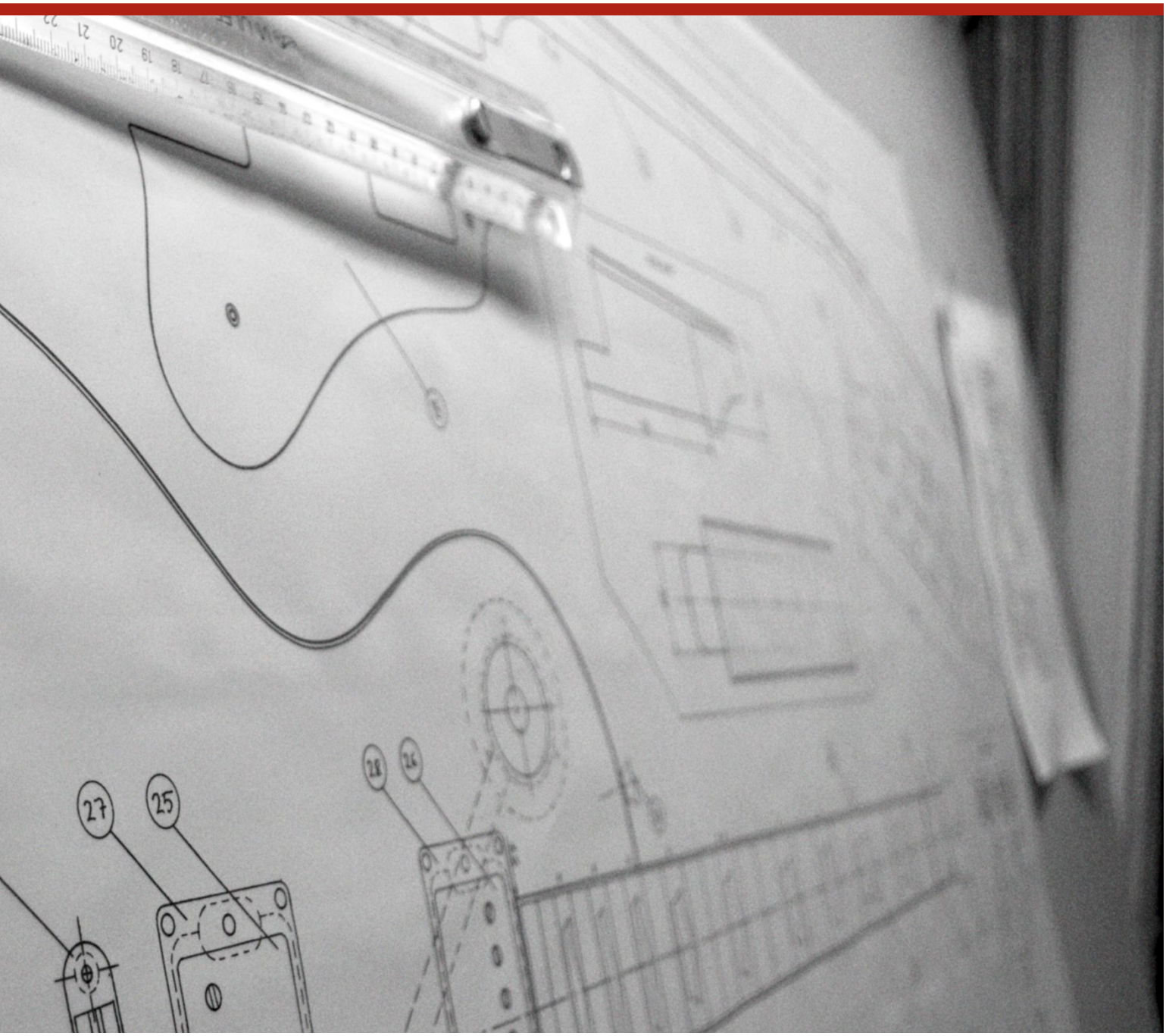
By Juha Ruokangas

Ruokangas Guitars



When it comes to electric guitars, the Gibson Les Paul was for sure my first love. I've often thought about why, and I guess I have to admit the actual reason was how the Les Paul looked - or better yet - how the rock stars looked and sounded with that guitar hung on their necks. I started playing guitar at about the age of 10 - that was 1982 - and whereas my very first musical influences were Iron Maiden (The Number Of The Beast, the hot new thing at the time) and the like, my taste diverged very fast to bands like Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Uriah Heep, Cream... and those giants led me to other stuff like Jethro Tull, Genesis (the old stuff with Peter Gabriel), Yes, Rush - a lot of prog rock and eventually guys like Jeff Beck in his fusion era, early 70's, Jeff is still my biggest guitar hero of all time. And what comes to the earlier referral to falling in love with the Les Paul looks - see the cover of Jeff's Blow By Blow album, and you know what I mean.

Later on, when I was stumbling to learn the art of guitar craft, the Les Paul guitar was still there, lurking behind my shoulder. While in guitar making school (early 90's) I got an opportunity to visit a collector who owned an all original 1957 goldtop Les Paul, and I was fortunate enough to spend a day measuring, drawing and playing that guitar. For a young wannabe guitar maker this was quite an eye-opening occasion. I realized right there and



then that the guitar Les Paul had evolved to be later on (late 60's, 70's, 80's and so on) wasn't really the same thing as this old timer from 1957. By then I had done the same as any kid with no money would do - drool at the guitar stores, and sometimes encourage myself to pick up a guitar and strike a chord or two. I still remember how I thought time and time again, "Wow, the Les Pauls are so heavy..." And then later on sitting down with that 1957 Les Paul (and other pieces from that era, I later learned), noticing that it was not heavy at all - my astonishment had no end...

This was the world before internet, so I couldn't go ahead and Google "Les Paul" or anything else for that matter, but I did gather all the information I could, mainly from books. I learned that the Les Paul guitar was originally launched in the early 50's and eventually discontinued in 1960 because it didn't sell... In the late 60's, Gibson however, woke up to notice old Les Pauls in the hands of many popular guitarists, with Eric Clapton in the lead. So Gibson then decided to give the guitar another chance, and started making it again in 1968. But something had changed. The very reason why the original Les Paul weight happened to be generally between 7 to 8 lbs was the body and neck material - Honduran mahogany. Gibson continued using the same material in the 60's Les Pauls but the availability got scarce and the quality of the raw material got more and more unstable - and the guitars got heavier. By the end of 70's Gibson solved the worst weight problem by drilling holes to the bodies to remove excess weight.

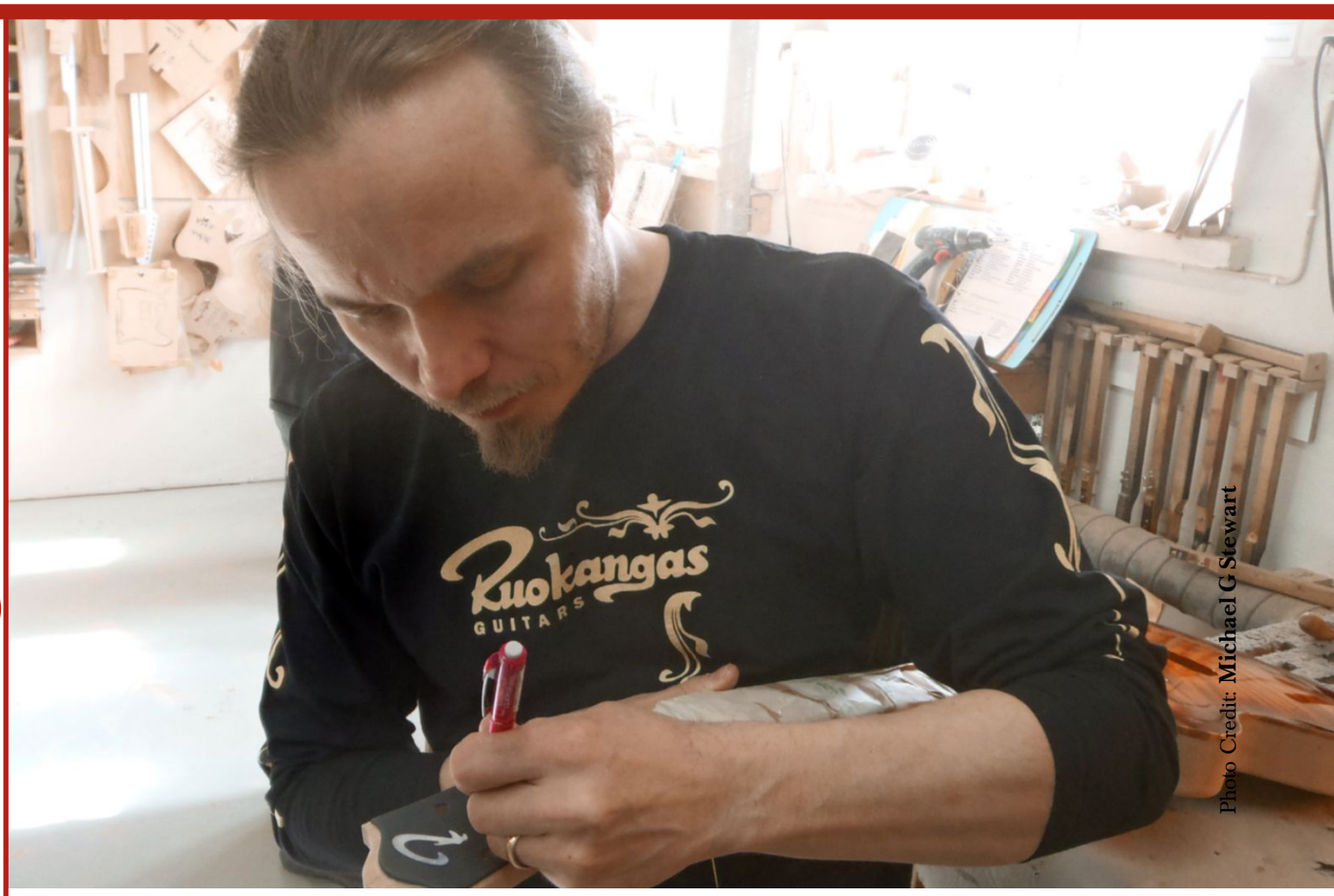


Photo Credit: **Michael G Stewart**

Juha signing off on headstock

Later on this procedure got a name "weight relief". But still to this day it's not a widely known fact that basically all (except a small percentage of the Custom Shop historic collection guitars from recent years) Les Paul bodies since late 70's are drilled full of holes like Swiss cheese... Eventually Gibson stepped out of the closet and admitted this is the case (hell, nowadays you cannot keep secrets like this with x-rays & internet... everybody will find out anyway!).

All production Les Pauls are either weight relieved or sound chambered. The original Les Paul was however a solid body guitar, and sounded quite different too.

Sorry about the history lesson but I felt necessary to open the subject a bit deeper to fully make you understand why I ended up designing my guitars as I did and using the materials I do. Learning the history of Les Paul entwined with my luthier studies, and in1994 I happened to apprentice at a classical guitar work shop in Finland - Liikanen Guitars they're called - and they stuck a spokeshave to my hands and had me carve some guitar necks for them. One of those necks was an old piece of Honduran mahogany, and the rest were Spanish cedar - the most common neck wood used in high end classical guitars. When carving those necks I instantly noticed how lightweight both the Honduran Mahogany and Spanish Cedar were, and how similar they were to work with. The timbre and bend strength of both wood species were very similar too. I asked the Liikanen brothers if anyone has made electric guitars out of Spanish Cedar. And next to me Juha Lottonen (another great Finnish luthier who shared a workshop with Liikanen) said: "I have. Works great".

Lottonen had made earlier a Les Paul replica out of Spanish Cedar, but I never got to try that guitar - and I got more and more curious. By the end of my trainee period at Liikanen I ended up buying a plank of Spanish Cedar from them, just about enough wood to carve out three electric guitars.

I started my own company in 1995, and my first take on the Les Paul was the Duke model I designed in 1995-1996. After playing around with prototypes for a while I made a batch of three guitars and used up all my Spanish Cedar. I still have the #1 of those three, and very little has changed up to this day. The Duke recipe

Ruokangas Guitars

"I had a very clear vision of my ultimate goal: An innovative guitar that looks traditional so people won't get scared. A solid body electric guitar that sounds and feels like the original Les Paul without having any of the Les Paul shortcomings..."

Ruokangas Guitars

Duke Artisan

has remained pretty much the same as I originally composed it. The Duke was a modern double-cutaway design, visually influenced by stuff Jol Dantzig (Hamer) and Paul Reed Smith were doing. But still, playability-wise I was very much looking at designing a guitar for those who love the Les Paul sounds and feels, but would appreciate a better playing comfort, lighter weight and more open tone - in the spirit of the original Les Paul.

12 years later, after designing a bunch of different guitars, I was itching to return to the Les Paul concept once more. I felt strongly that a few stones were still unturned... I had gained a lot of experience during my years in the profession, and I had also grown painfully aware of how conservative the guitar business is.

I would have never imagined 12 years earlier how difficult and laborious it is to sell guitars that are made of wood not used by anybody else. Internet was taking its first baby steps, and nobody talked about the boutique guitar scene then. The vintage renaissance bloomed like never before; new guitars being whipped to look like old guitars... The fact that the original Gibson Les Paul was such a great instrument and had become such a larger-than-life icon, had created a whole branch of business, countless factories and small builders replicating the Les Paul, with Gibson themselves in the lead. But to me it seemed that everyone was doing it more or less blind - replicating the shell, not the soul. For example - for me- using mahogany just didn't make sense... It doesn't sound the same, it only looks the same. Why use it? Because Gibson used 60 years ago a wood that had the same trade name? No thank you.

I had a very clear vision of my ultimate goal: An innovative guitar that looks traditional so people won't get scared. A solid body electric guitar that sounds and feels like the original Les Paul without having any of the Les Paul shortcomings. Notice - as long as the materials I use are reliable and deliver the result I'm after, I don't care the slightest bit what they are. I don't need to use Honduran Mahogany just because that's the way it used to be. It's like that joke: "How many country singers does it take to change a light bulb? Five. One changes the bulb and the rest sing a song about how much better the old bulb was..."

This is the significant difference with my guitars as compared to many others - I dare to use unusual materials, and I'm stubborn enough to keep using them

Highly figured arctic birch top

as long as it takes to convince the players. An example, I use moose shin bone as the nut material because it's seriously the best material there is. I don't mind that we have to gather moose legs from hunters every autumn, skin and chop them to pieces and boil them on open fire for a whole day to clean them up. It's a hell of a work but pays off in the end. The same goes for Arctic birch. There's no supplier I can call and order 5A tops... or any tops for that matter. No, I need to go to the forest with the timberjack to pick my trees and go from there.

It takes years to process from the raw material to graded tops piled on our workshop shelves. Again, a lot of work but I don't mind as long as we get the product right.

I've never enjoyed playing a Les Paul sitting down, the guitar is so back heavy. It feels like the "butt" weighs too much and pulls the guitar to the floor. I wanted to improve this in some subtle way, without making the guitar look modern (that's a curse word in guitar design, ha!). Also I was very well aware of the Achilles' heel of Les Paul - the headstock that snaps off way too easy (ask any guitar repair shop, they know what I'm talking about!).

I wanted to improve this too - and again, without changing the tone or the look. I knew this was quite a challenge to pull through, but luckily I had a few aces up my sleeve, experience gathered when designing the Duke and my other guitars...

I named my new guitar "Unicorn" after the mythical creature from European folklore. The name fit well, since I had after all started some sort of a hunt after the Holy Grail of electric guitars.

It was obvious to me from the start that the wood combination would be Spanish cedar for the body and neck, and Arctic birch for the top. The Spanish cedar, I explained a bit earlier (Duke model), had over the years become one of the trademark features of my guitars. And I totally love it! It's the most responsive tone wood I have ever encountered, and an absolutely perfect body and neck wood for this type of electric guitar. Why Arctic birch? This great domestic (Finnish) tone wood has become another trademark feature for my guitars, and there are good reasons for it. Since the first time I made a Spanish cedar guitar with Arctic birch top (in 1998), I realized that it's even better than the combination of cedar and maple that I had been using until then.

Finnish birch is very similar sounding to maple, but it has a slightly deeper tone and warmth to it that complements the super dynamic tone of the Spanish cedar in a very satisfying way. I absolutely love it!

Another feature that my guitars are kind of "famous" about is the thermo treatment - a special method to further improve the

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This Page: Juha with Unicorn #1 - Opposite Page: Unicorn #1 detailed shot

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stability and tone of good quality tone wood. All our birch tops are thermo treated, and the Unicorn was not to be an exception. ToneQuest Report published an excellent article about us and thermo treatment some years ago (you can find it online from our website). We've thermo treated all our maple, alder and birch since turn of the millennium. This technology has finally surfaced also in North America.

And now such makers as Music Man, Suhr Guitars and Tom Anderson Guitarworks offer "roasted maple" for their guitar necks. Despite the name, this is exactly the same technology we've pioneered and used in Finland for over 12 years.

I wanted the Unicorn body to have the same thickness and overall size as the Les Paul, the same neck angle, headstock angle and other crucial measurements. All these things contribute to the tone, and I didn't want to alter anything that wasn't wrong in the first place.

The outline of my guitar however ended up surprisingly far from Les Paul, yet a quick glance won't necessarily reveal this. The most significant change is the rounder Stromberg jazz box influenced cutaway shape.

I also shifted the waistline of the body quite a bit lower to improve the balance of the guitar when you play sitting down. The most important constructional improvement is without a doubt the headstock. I've repaired way too many broken Les Paul headstocks... The problem is caused by the steep headstock angle and the fact that Gibson made (and still makes!) the neck of a single piece of wood.

This causes grain run-out in the headstock joint area, making

The Big Bo
Kansas

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Unicorn control cavities in progress

this spot of the neck surprisingly prone to breakage. The truss rod channel weakens this point even more. Personally, I think it's horrendously irresponsible and shortsighted for Gibson to not fix such an obvious design error of a relatively expensive production guitar.

I did quite a few maneuvers to improve this error, and I'm proud of how well it turned out. The headstock is made of a separate piece of Spanish Cedar, eliminating the grain run-out. I added also maple splines that cross the headstock glue joint, and are hidden under the fretboard and headstock veneer. You can see all this in detail on the Unicorn videos .

This multiple laminated construction makes the neck strong - so strong that on the Unicorn video diary (episode 6, I think) I'm standing on the neck and it doesn't break. Don't try to do that at home to your Gibson guitar!

Throughout the whole design process I proceeded with my normal routine of viewing every detail and re-thinking / re-designing every part if need be. This applies not only to materials, finishes or construction, but also to work methods. The whole concept matters.

At my workshop we don't do any serial production at all. This means we don't use modern computer controlled routing machines, lasers or any of that. I've come to a conclusion that this is genuinely a better way to do it for us. The modern technologies in guitar design would lead us on a path I don't want to step on to. I enjoy more the hands-on way of doing things, which keeps us in full body contact with what we do, and even with who we are-- Zen and the art of luthiery!

One interesting feature in an electric guitar is the pickups. A typical scenario is that somebody might have a guitar that sounds dark and muddy, and he wants to improve it by changing pickups. To some extent this may work ok, but the fact is that the acoustic properties of the guitar itself dictate very much what the amplified sound will be like.

So no matter which pickups you put to that dark sounding guitar, the muddiness will come through. You can of course fine tune the tone with the pickup, and you can alter the way the guitar drives your amp, but the foundation (the guitar itself) needs to be right first.

I'm often comparing the electric guitar pickup to a vocal microphone. No matter how expensive and state-of-the-art microphone you put in front of me, I won't sound other than myself. It's the same thing with a guitar pickup.

One can claim that the electric guitar pickup only picks up the

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vibration of the string, and yes maybe it does, but the way the string vibrates, the way the harmonics are enhanced or cancelled, the way the string interacts with the body and neck resonance-- it's a complex equation. The ideal situation is that the guitar itself provides a healthy and even frequency range. A great sounding electric guitar typically needs to have a good dose of certain lower mids and sparkling highs to cut through in the mix. If your guitar doesn't provide those frequencies acoustically, you're screwed.

Changing pickups won't help. This is the great thing about the combination of Spanish cedar and Arctic birch. It's seriously my Holy Grail that simply just works like a dream, in many different guitar models. The guitars have such clarity, openness and unparalleled dynamics that I couldn't hope for any better. By having the foundation right, it's been a lot easier to proceed with the pickup design together with our main pickup guy Harry Haeussel. We ended up making a lot of prototypes, and then started narrowing down to a certain design which was then refined a few times to get everything perfect. I wanted the Unicorn Custom Humbucker to have asymmetrically wound coils to make the pickup a bit less compressing, in order to support the dynamic tone of the guitar so when you hit the string, the attack of every note is powerful and clear. I truly respect Harry's insight and knowledge of pickup wizardry. It's amazing to me that when I tell him I want more "thud" when I hit the string or I want more 'growl' to the mids, this guy delivers every time! Magic, if you ask my opinion...

The “Project Unicorn” happened in 2008-2009. And in the beginning of it all, Emma and I had the idea to shoot the design and build process on video, and publish it to YouTube as a documentary. First we were both a bit uncertain whether it’s a wise thing to do at all since usually such a process is kept behind closed curtains; top secret. But in the end, we felt that the only way to make people understand the concept is to show the concept, nothing held back.

So there it is, my heart and soul, the culmination of my career up until a few years ago, the Unicorn Video Diary. The episode 16 was a fun thing to do. We invited some friends to a local club, and a good friend of mine brought along his original 1959 burst Les Paul, the only one in Finland, I assume. We also got a few nice reissue Custom Shop Les Pauls in the house-- and then we did some serious A/B/C testing! Check it out, the whole thing is still online, you can find it from our website or our YouTube channel. An interesting detail is that when we started doing the videos, Emma was very much a
beginner doing that stuff, and so the build process shows not only the development of the guitar, but also Emma’s development as a director & camerawoman & editor! It’s a total of 17 episodes, 5-10 minutes each, of dust and chips of wood-- and my endless babbling. Nightmare for anyone but the true enthusiast, ha!

www.ruokangas.com

Kevin Eubanks – "The Messenger"

by: Kelcey Alonzo

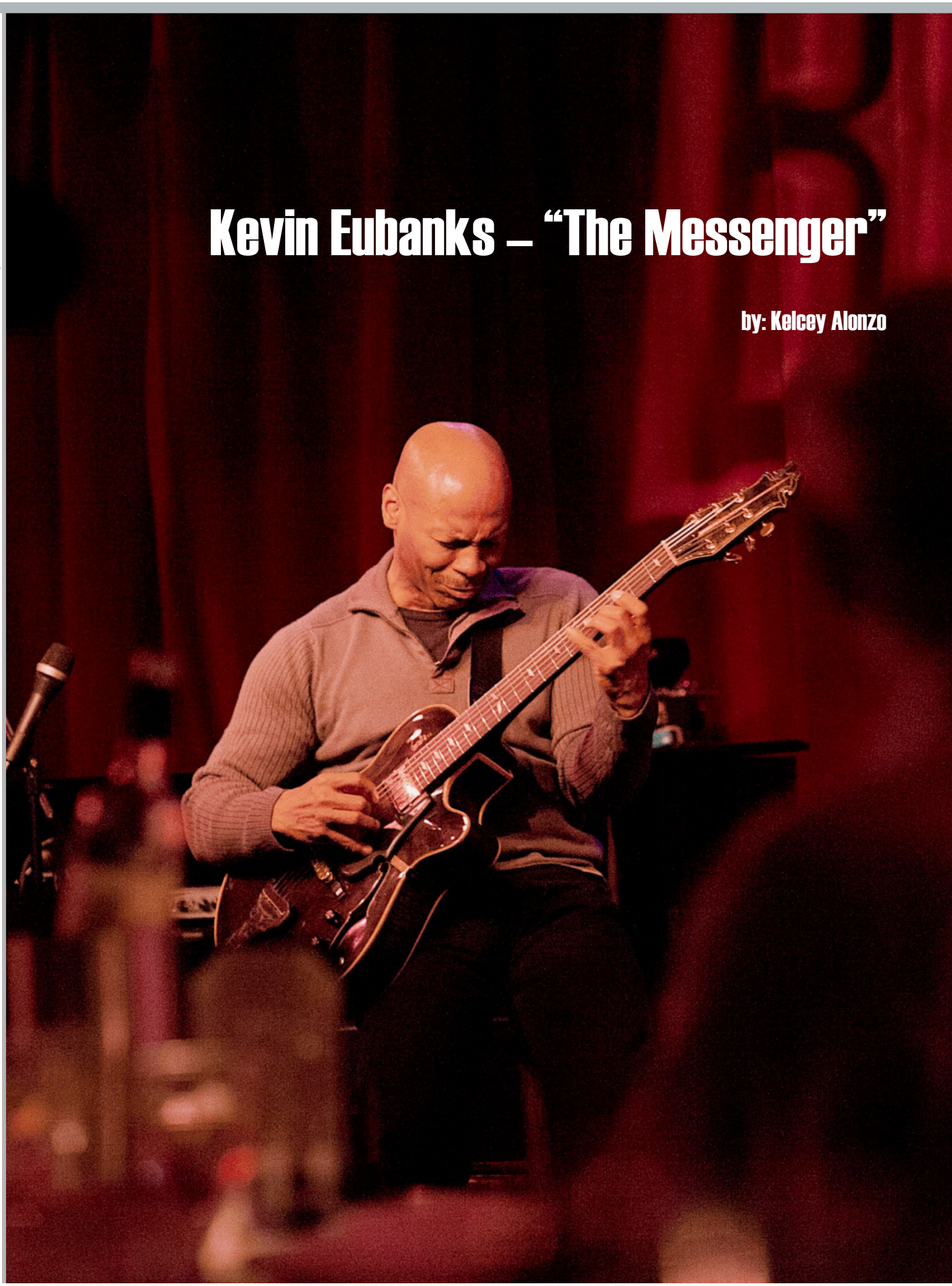


Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Soundcheck -Tuesday, April 9th, 3:32 PM

We arrive at Birdland for the soundcheck of the first NYC show the Kevin Eubanks Quartet will perform later that evening. Immediately upon entering the venue, I see four musicians warming up. Kevin Eubanks is fiddling with his octave pedal, doing some runs up and down the neck (I swore there was a bass player behind him doubling his runs). Then suddenly there is silence for about 3 seconds. This is the band's cue to get ready, and then Kevin says: "Ready?"-- and they begin playing.

I immediately instruct my photographer to start shooting. I tell her, "just get anything you can". She goes to work. After 10 minutes Kevin looks in our direction, and in a very soft, friendly voice says: "Hi guys, welcome and thanks for coming...you guys getting the stuff?" We nod our heads, assuring him we are, and he goes right back to work with his band for the rest of the afternoon as we continue our shoot.

Kevin Eubanks

Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Kevin Eubanks sound check at Birdland

8:31 PM – Showtime!
Birdland is packed, and you can feel the audience anticipation of the magical evening to come. After all, we've watched Kevin for the 15 years he provided the musical backdrop for NBC's Tonight Show, and his lively banter with host Jay Leno.

To us it's like catching up with an old friend. The quartet takes center stage and greets the crowd. They are tight! Just like at soundcheck, only this time it's for real as the audience begins soaking in music from Kevin's latest record "The Messenger", along with some of his earlier material.

Kevin is relaxed, having fun but always focused. His Abe Rivera archtop is like a 5th member of the band, delivering tones that I can only describe in words you would hear in a coffee commercial; smooth, rich, full bodied and well... delicious!

After the show, Eubanks was gracious enough to chat with us about the new album, "The Messenger", his gear and what he's got coming up.

When we were finished, I thanked Mr. Eubanks, and he simply shook my hand and said, "Thanks for coming by, I really appreciate it".

Guitar Connoisseur: You come from a musical family, and played the violin, piano and trumpet. What drew you to the guitar, and why did this become the instrument you settled on?

Kevin Eubanks: I saw a James Brown concert at the Uptown Theater in Philadelphia, and I remember leaving the show, looking down at the curb and saying to myself, "I'm going to play the guitar." You'd figure I'd want to sing and dance because he was so badass… The greatest! For some reason, what I got out of it was "play the guitar". Must've been some Jedi mind s**t. And that was before there were even Jedi's. That's how badass JB was.

Gc: You mean it wasn't the chicks?

Kevin Eubanks

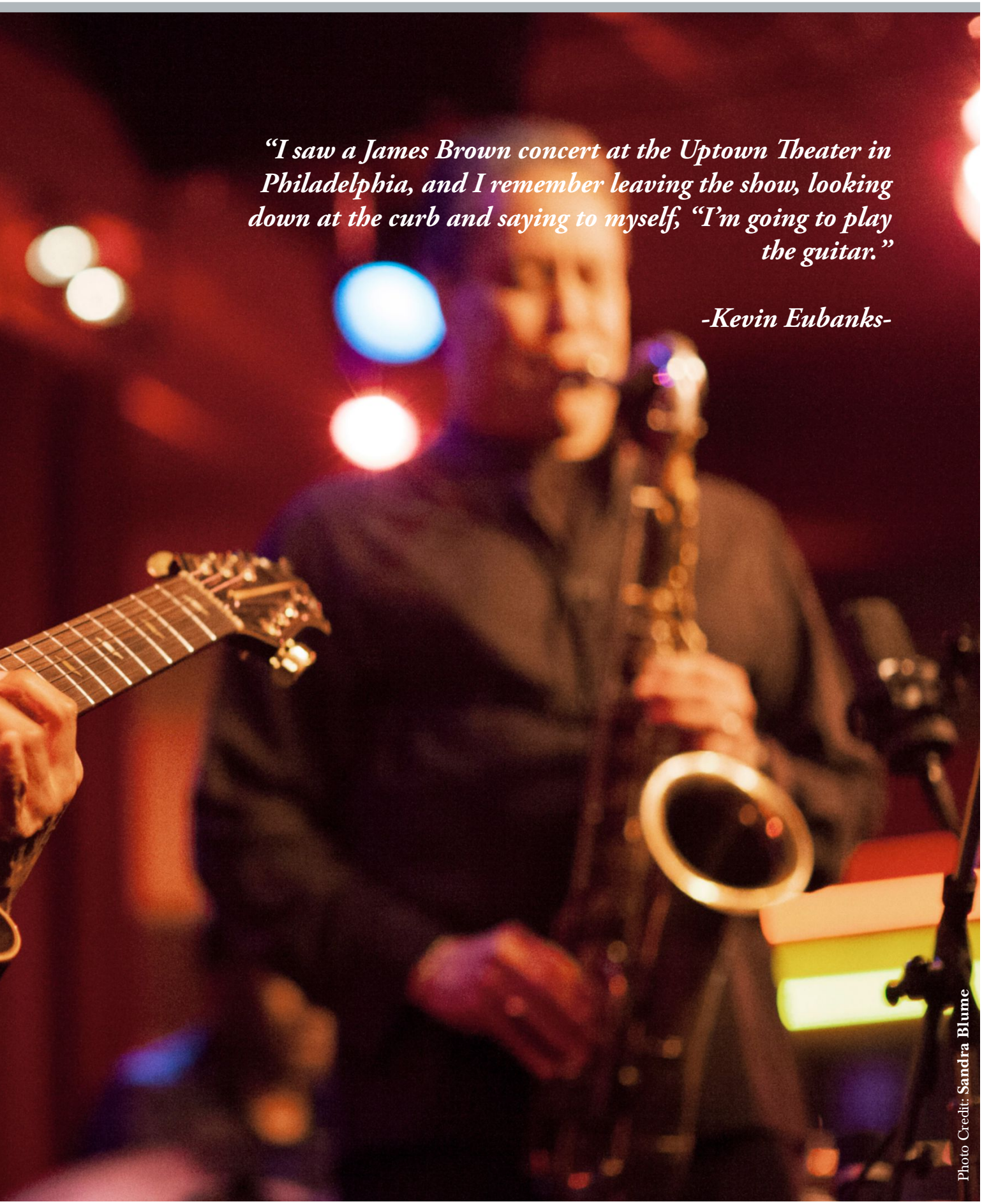


Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Left to Right: Kevin Eubanks and Rene Camacho

KE: Are you kidding? I've been afraid of girls my whole life!!

Gc: How do you like playing in NYC?

KE: I love it! Reminds me of when I was living there. Only difference is that now I see I must have been out of my mind to move here with $800 and a guitar-- me plus three roommates in a one bedroom, and one was a drummer who played loud as can be!

We used his floor tom-tom as a table.

Insane, but that was life at the time. Nothing like the adventure of following your dream.

Gc: Are you touring with the same rig you used on The Tonight Show?

KE: Not at all. I use a GK MB200 and a MB500 now. I also have my little pedals like we all do.

Gc: While we are on the subject, I noticed only one guitar. Do you typically tour with just one instrument?

KE: Yes. I think I've broken three strings my entire career on stage, and that's from loving the sound of a flat sounding string. Nice and warm and ready to break. Rarely happens though. I also do not like changing the feel from one guitar to another.

Each guitar feels different, and it takes some getting used to so I'd rather not. I can get the different sounds I need out of the one guitar.

It's not all in the guitar anyway. It's your hands that have most of the sound.

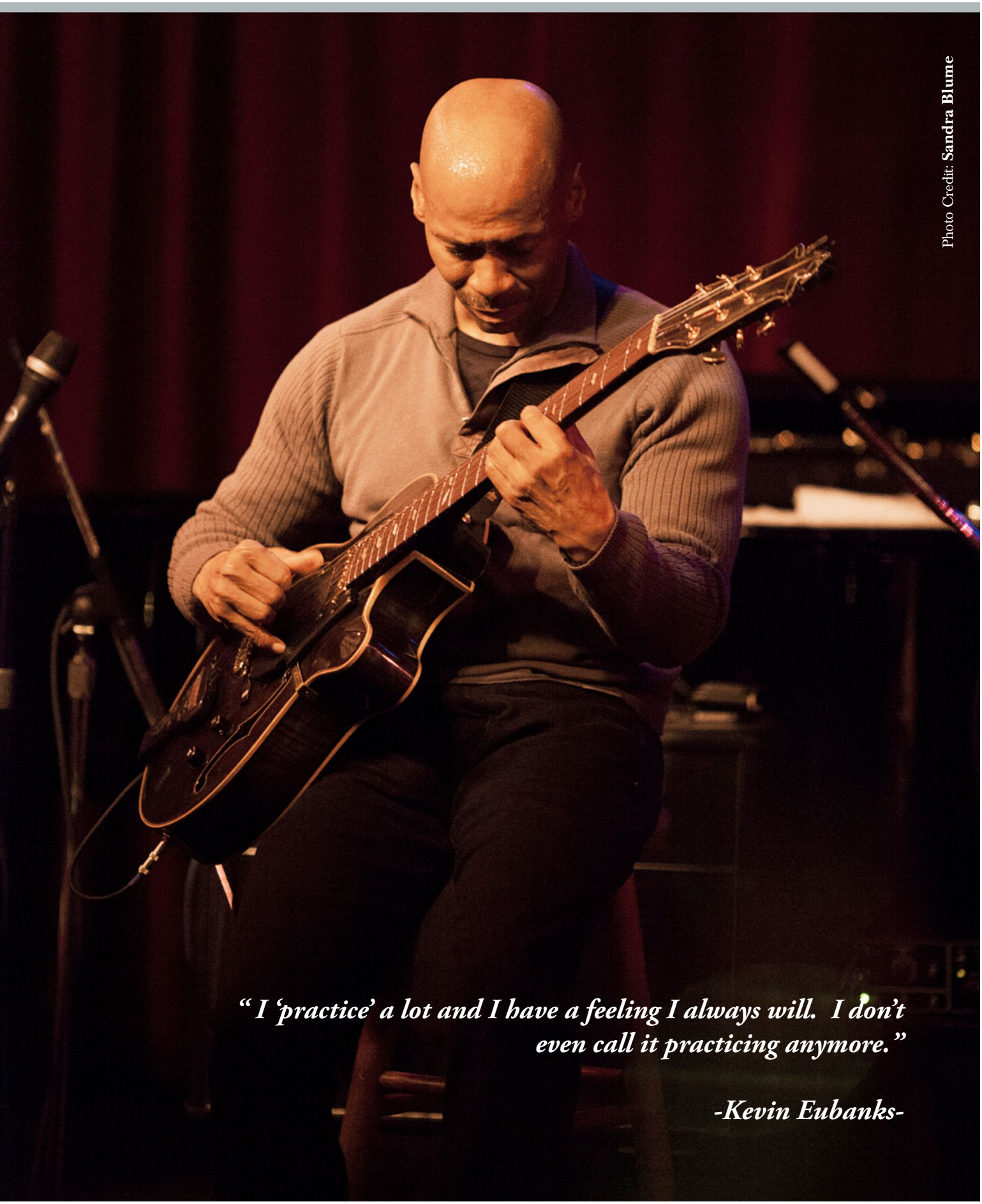


Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

" I 'practice' a lot and I have a feeling I always will. I don't even call it practicing anymore."

-Kevin Eubanks-

Kevin Eubanks

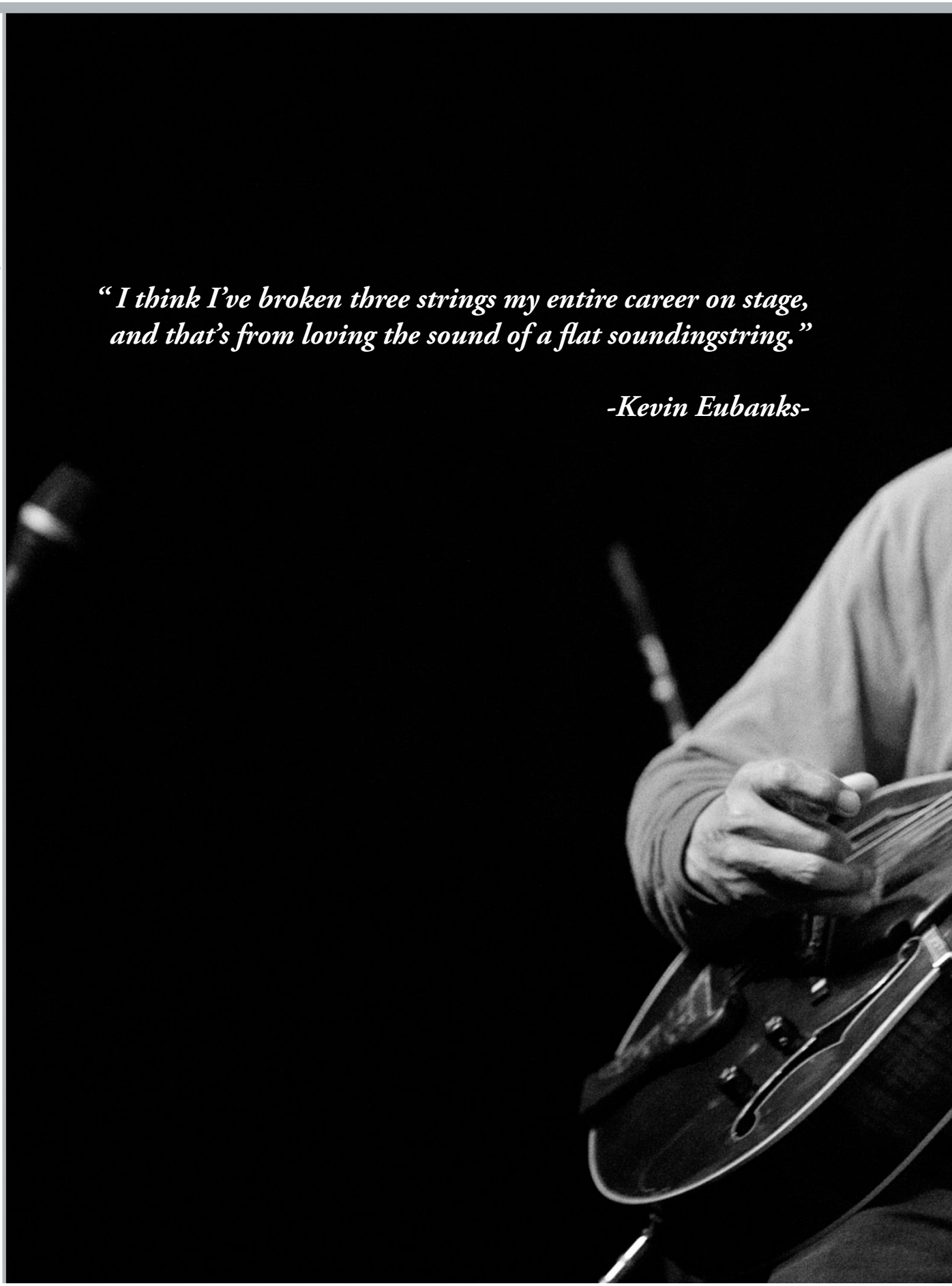
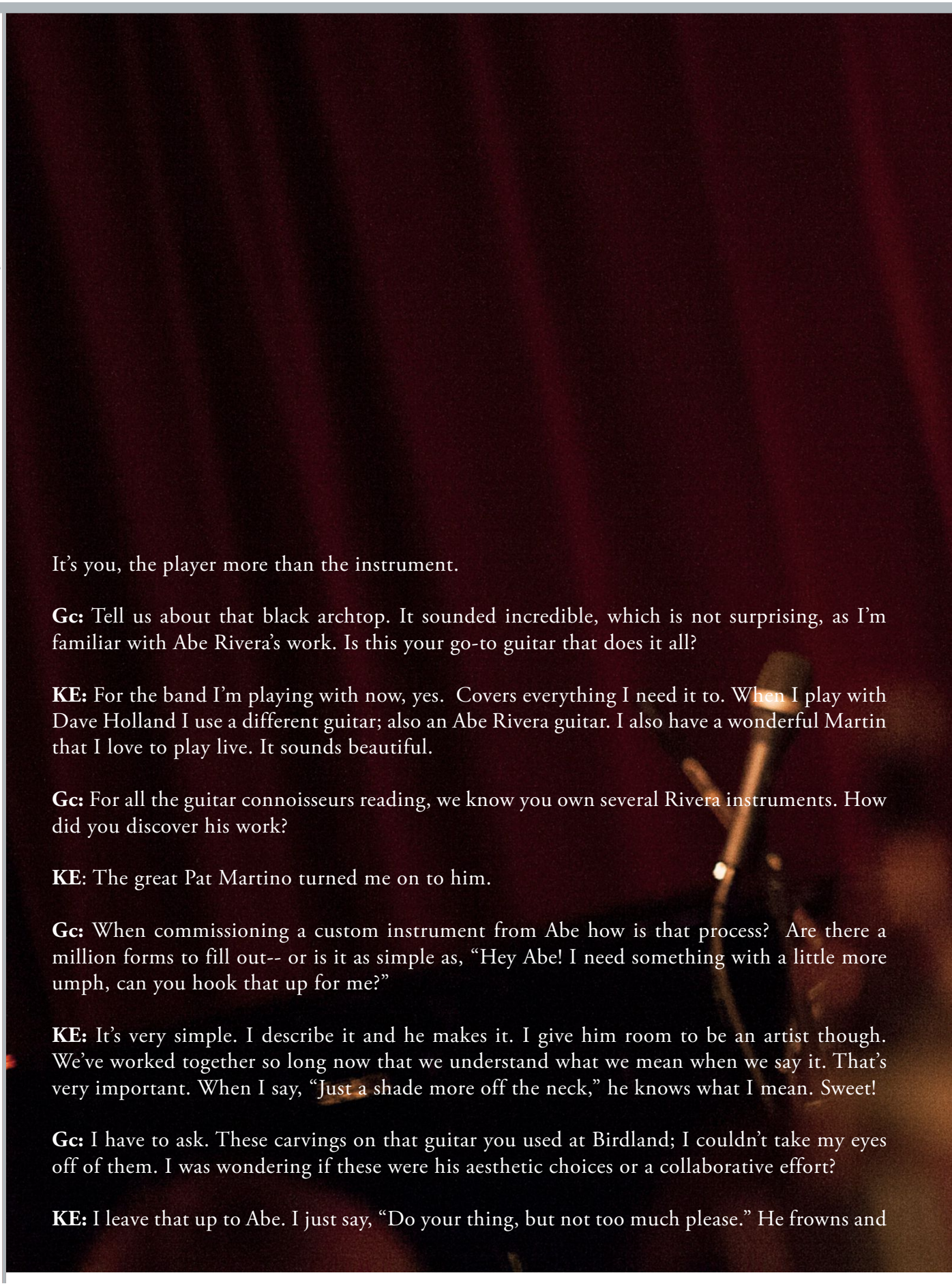


Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**



It's you, the player more than the instrument.

Gc: Tell us about that black archtop. It sounded incredible, which is not surprising, as I'm familiar with Abe Rivera's work. Is this your go-to guitar that does it all?

KE: For the band I'm playing with now, yes. Covers everything I need it to. When I play with Dave Holland I use a different guitar; also an Abe Rivera guitar. I also have a wonderful Martin that I love to play live. It sounds beautiful.

Gc: For all the guitar connoisseurs reading, we know you own several Rivera instruments. How did you discover his work?

KE: The great Pat Martino turned me on to him.

Gc: When commissioning a custom instrument from Abe how is that process? Are there a million forms to fill out-- or is it as simple as, "Hey Abe! I need something with a little more umph, can you hook that up for me?"

KE: It's very simple. I describe it and he makes it. I give him room to be an artist though. We've worked together so long now that we understand what we mean when we say it. That's very important. When I say, "Just a shade more off the neck," he knows what I mean. Sweet!

Gc: I have to ask. These carvings on that guitar you used at Birdland; I couldn't take my eyes off of them. I was wondering if these were his aesthetic choices or a collaborative effort?

KE: I leave that up to Abe. I just say, "Do your thing, but not too much please." He frowns and

Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Kevin Eubanks

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Kevin Eubanks

Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Tier 2 Kenai Steve Stevens tested on the road

doesn't do too much. He could carve an entire scene if you want that. He's great at that. I'm a bit more low key.

Gc: What were you playing before Abe Rivera guitars?

KE: George Benson Ibanez model. It was really nice too. I still have it. Probably a collectors item by now. Damn, I should get George to sign it! I also had a sunburst Les Paul which is hanging on the wall in Arsenio Hall's house.

Gc: Let's talk about your new record "The Messenger". It's a departure from your previous record "Zen Food." It's a much funkier record. Was this intentional?

KE: Somewhat yes. I just suggested more and directed less, and trusted everyone to find our collective groove.

It was much more fun to record and has a much more open feel. It's really a groove type CD.

Goes to different places, and we all go there by feel… not by directing it to go there.

Gc: On the funkier side, you've got tracks like Led Boots, JB and 420, but then you hit us with some wonderful compositions like the title track, Loved Ones, and your cover of Coltrane's Resolution. This sounds like a very balanced record.

Why were these the right selection of songs for this record?

KE: They give the recording balance and depth. They add wisdom to the party.

Gc: Is there anything on this album you wish you could change, or are you 100% satisfied with it?

KE: I wish Alvin Chea could have brought the rest of "Take 6" to be at the sessions. I love that group, and I was so happy that he is on the CD with me.

Kevin Eubanks

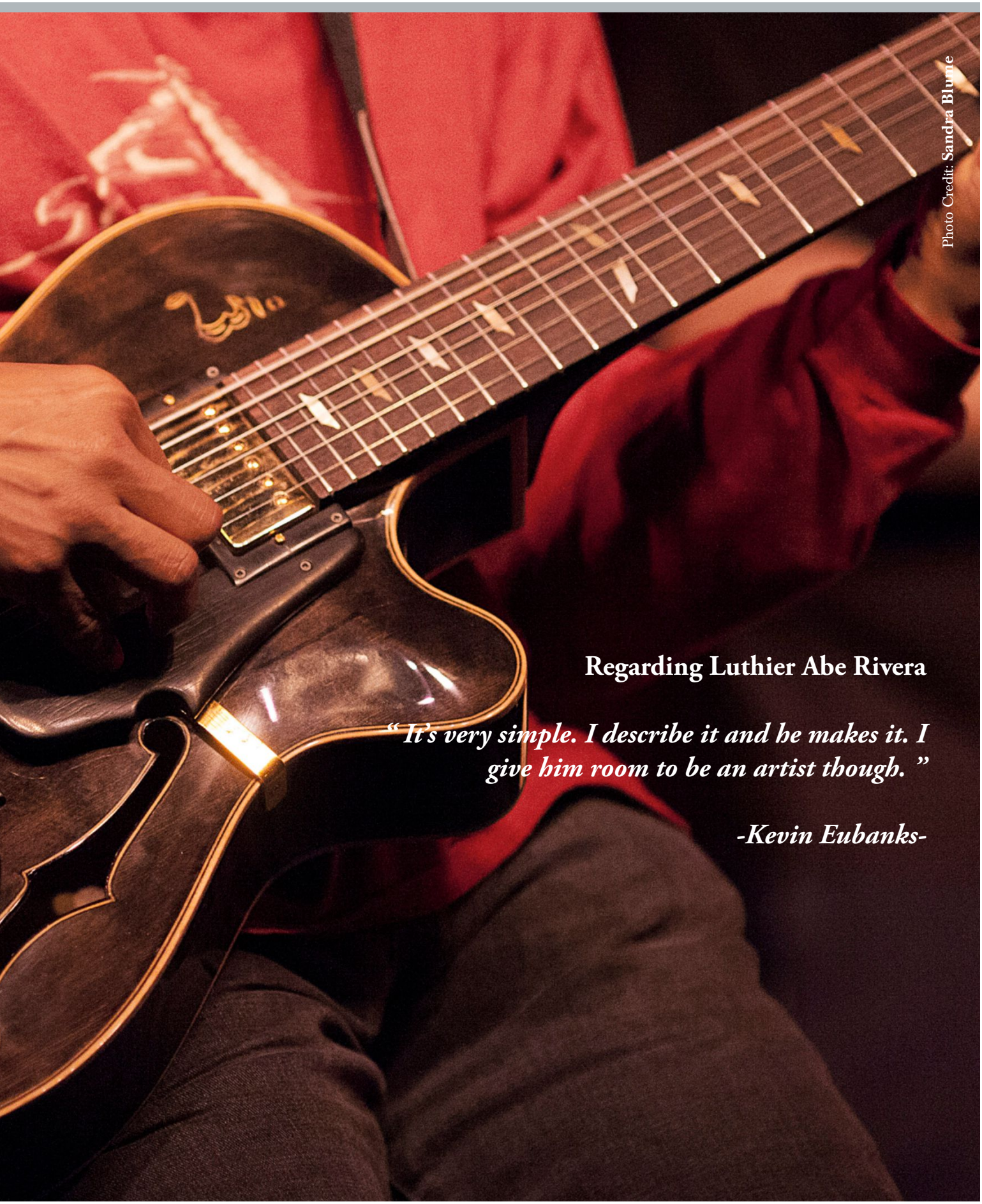


Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Regarding Luthier Abe Rivera

" It's very simple. I describe it and he makes it. I give him room to be an artist though. "

-Kevin Eubanks-

Kevin Eubanks saying hello in between sets

Gc: How has life changed since stepping down as Bandleader of The Tonight Show?

KE: Really, dude?

Gc: *(Chuckles)* Fine...Ok...Our readers would love to know how much practicing are you doing these days if any...and if so, what are you practicing?

KE: I 'practice' a lot and I have a feeling I always will. I don't even call it practicing anymore. You're on the instrument playing, searching, learning, spending your day with it, creating… it's part of my life.

It's not something that I add to my life. It's not separate. I miss it when I don't, and when I get back to it, I'm glad to see it and hold it and catch up. It's alive!

Gc: What are some of the projects you have coming up?

KE: More touring with my band and tours with Dave Holland's PRISM band. We have a new CD coming out later this year. As a girl said to me recently, "Smokin hot!" She was talking about some other guy but... oh well. It's a hot CD.

Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Kevin Eubanks

Bassist Rene Camacho, Saxophonist Bill Pierce, & Kevin Eubanks

Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Kevin Eubanks

Photo Credit: **Sandra Blume**

Gc: What advice would you give to musicians wanting a full time career in music?

KE: Dedication.

Gc: Is there anything else you would like our readers to know that we didn't cover?

KE: Yes, guitar players are insane. So if you date one, you need to be really grounded and just a wee bit crazy for it to have a chance.

Gc: Thanks for letting us attend the show and talking to us!

KE: My pleasure. You guys did a great job of being unobtrusive. Thanks!

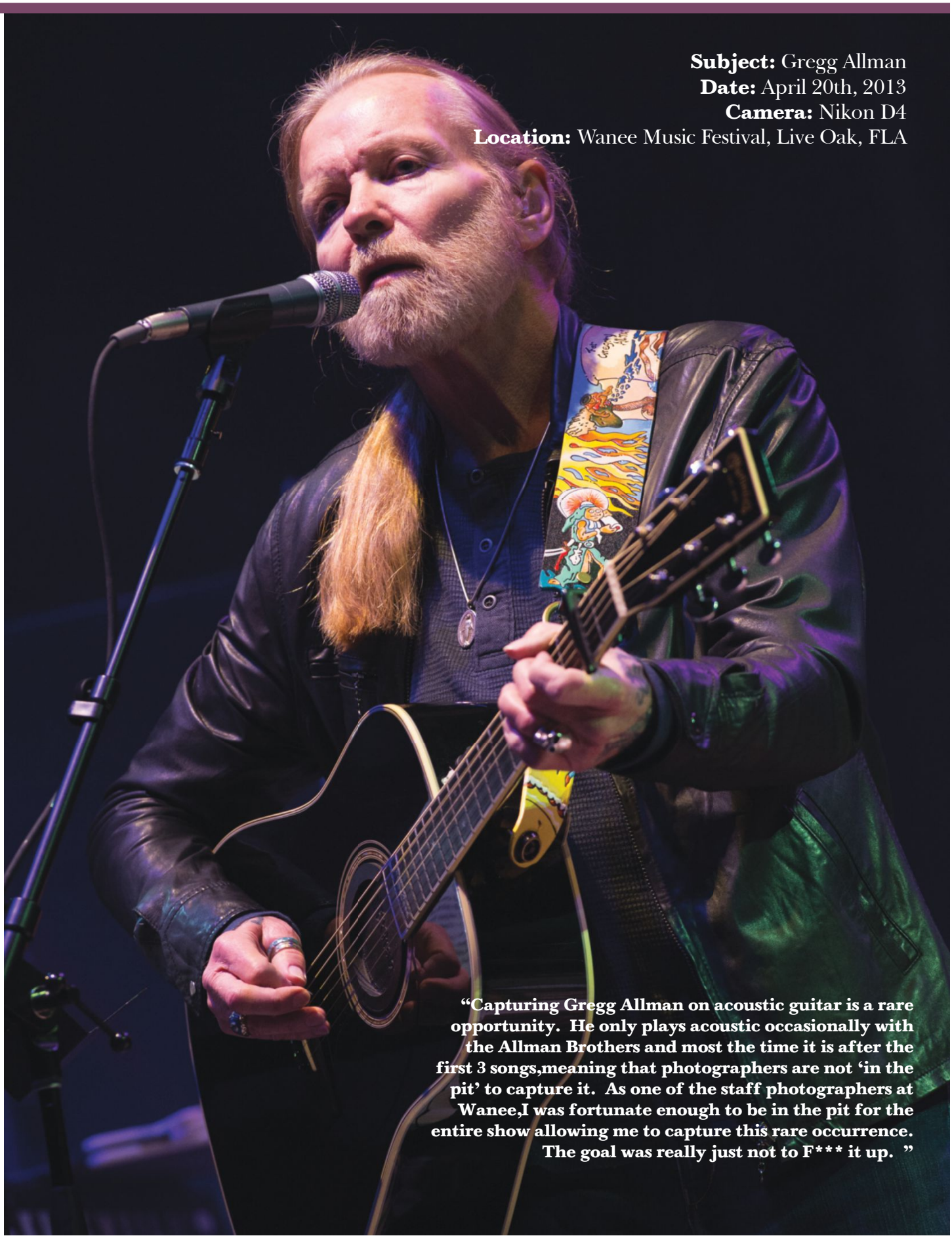
www.kevineubanks.com

Photographers Vault

Ian Rawn is a 32 year old IT manager who discovered his passion for concert photography in 2007 after purchasing his first DSLR camera. It was not long before the hobby became his obsession and a second career. Ian has always been a fan of live music as he was raised on the sounds of 60's and 70's folk and what is now classic rock.

Since his endeavors into photography began, there have been notable accomplishments including the construction of a professional grade photography studio in his house, assignment of the position of staff photographer at Hittin' the Note Magazine and Wanee Music Festival, as well as cover shots in both Guitar Player and Hittin' the Note Magazine. You have also seen his work on Jambase.com, Honest Tune.com, Relix Magazine, AirTran "GO" magazine, and the Allman Brother's 2012 Boxed Set.

Ian is fortunate enough to regularly shoot one of his favorite bands, Widespread Panic, and has his work featured on their website as well. Rawn's joy at capturing the moments of musical magic shines through to every image he creates and his passion for perfection leads him to never do any less that his absolute best.



Subject: Gregg Allman
Date: April 20th, 2013
Camera: Nikon D4
Location: Wanee Music Festival, Live Oak, FLA

"Capturing Gregg Allman on acoustic guitar is a rare opportunity. He only plays acoustic occasionally with the Allman Brothers and most the time it is after the first 3 songs,meaning that photographers are not 'in the pit' to capture it. As one of the staff photographers at Wanee,I was fortunate enough to be in the pit for the entire show allowing me to capture this rare occurrence. The goal was really just not to F* it up. "**

Photographers Vault

Subject: Gabriella
Date: May 15, 2010
Camera: Nikon D300S
Location: Hangout Festival, Gulf Shores, Alabama

Rodrigo Y Gabriella are an animated pair and a joy to photograph. With this shot,I was trying to capture Gabriella's concentration as she plucked away at her acoustic guitar.

Subject: Chris Robinson of the Black Crowes
Date: May 14, 2009
Camera: Nikon D300S
Location: Hangout Festival, Gulf Shores, Alabama

"The goal with this shot was to properly frame the singer while also capturing the reflection of the beach scene in his sunglasses. If you look closely you can see the festival crowd and Ferris wheel."

Photographers Vault

Subject: Tom Petty
Date: April 29, 2012
Camera: Nikon D300S
Location: Verizon Wireless at Encore Park, Alpharetta, GA

"Tom Petty can be trick artist to capture. He often hides being the mic but when he is not,he is running back and forth to either side of the stage. My goal here was to get a clean shot,artist and guitar,without the mic being in the way. The goal was met and I was fortunate to get a nice expression from the musician as well."

Subject: Janelle Monae
Date: March 10, 2012
Camera: Nikon D300S
Location: Fox Theatre, Atlanta, GA

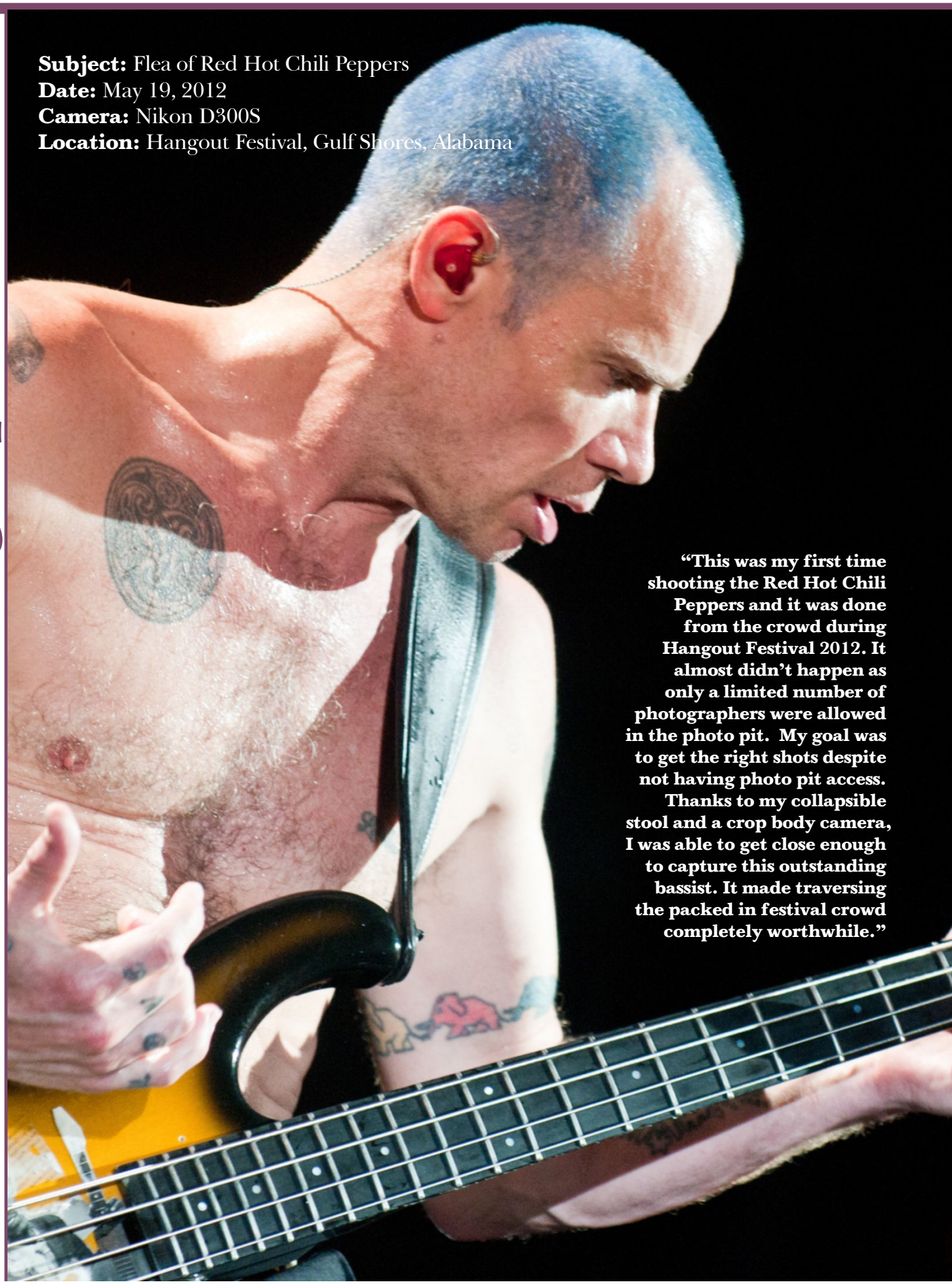
"Janelle was a special guest this night as part of the Experience Hendrix tour. She only came out for a song or two (Little Wing?) and almost immediately I wanted to find a way to capture her classic style and beauty. The moment and lighting were just right allowing me to get the image I wanted."

Photographers Vault

"The Tedeschi Trucks band set at Wanee is always a challenge to shoot. Their set is regularly scheduled for the late afternoon where photographers must battle the harsh light coming from behind the band and mix of shadow and direct sun light coming from the front. My goal was to get around this by shooting from stage right. This was accomplished and also enabled me to get a shot without the mic being in the way of the musician"

Subject: Name:Susan Tedeschi
Date: April 20, 2012
Camera: Nikon D4
Location: Wanee Music Festival, Live Oak, FLA

Photographers Vault



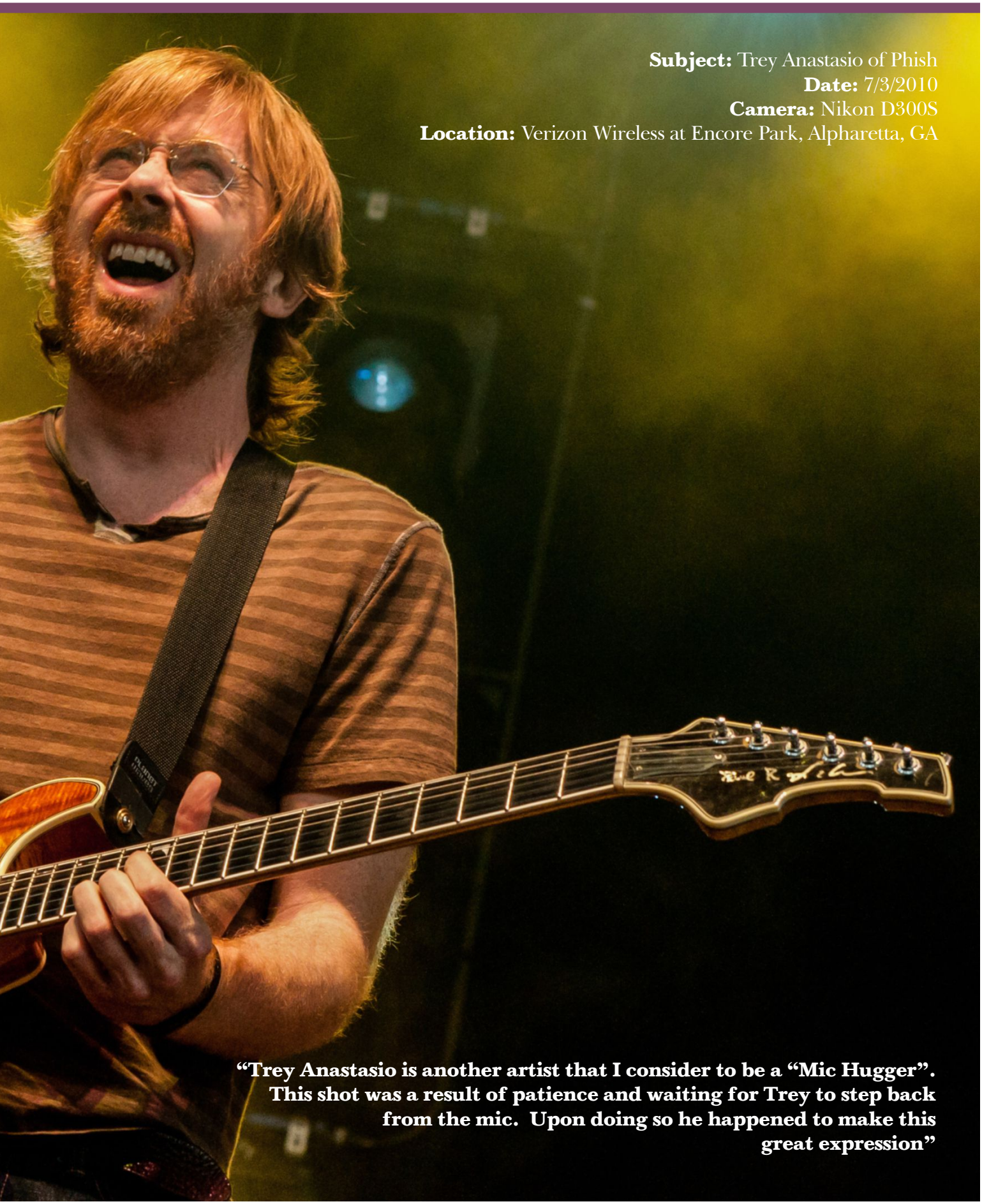
Subject: Flea of Red Hot Chili Peppers
Date: May 19, 2012
Camera: Nikon D300S
Location: Hangout Festival, Gulf Shores, Alabama

"This was my first time shooting the Red Hot Chili Peppers and it was done from the crowd during Hangout Festival 2012. It almost didn't happen as only a limited number of photographers were allowed in the photo pit. My goal was to get the right shots despite not having photo pit access. Thanks to my collapsible stool and a crop body camera, I was able to get close enough to capture this outstanding bassist. It made traversing the packed in festival crowd completely worthwhile."

Subject: Warren Haynes with the Allman Brothers
Date: April 19, 2013
Camera: Nikon D4
Location: Wanee Music Festival, Live Oak, FLA

"This photo was shot with the super sharp Nikon 300mm F2.8 VR2. As with most of my shots,my goal was to catch the musician at just the right moment. In this case the emotion coming off of the performer and the lighting were just right allowing me to catch what I consider to be a great shot"

Photographers Vault

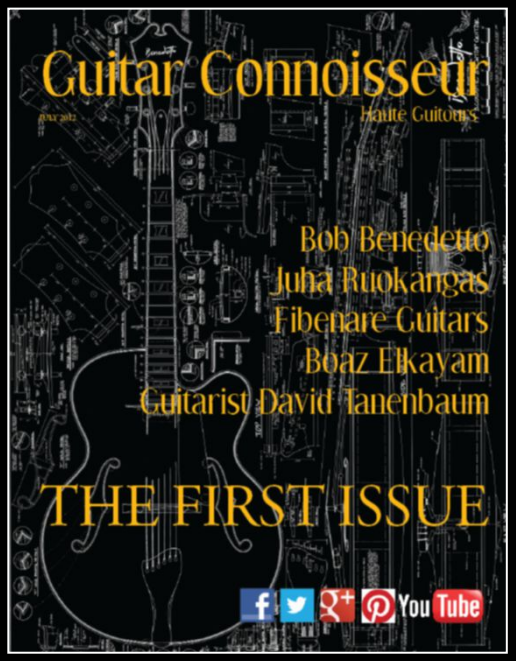


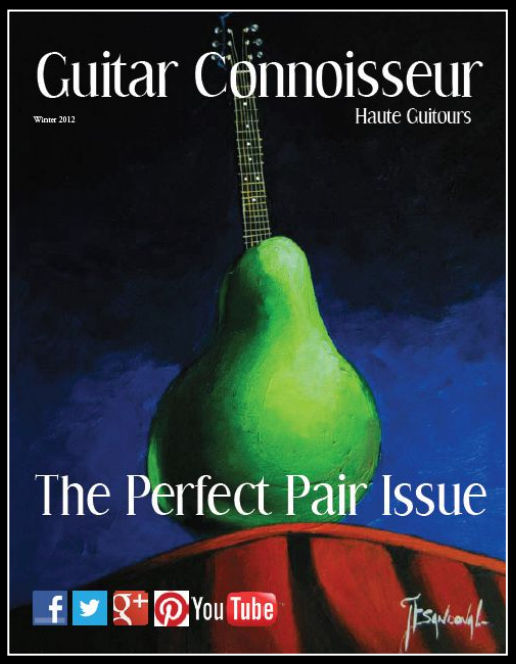
Subject: Trey Anastasio of Phish
Date: 7/3/2010
Camera: Nikon D300S
Location: Verizon Wireless at Encore Park, Alpharetta, GA

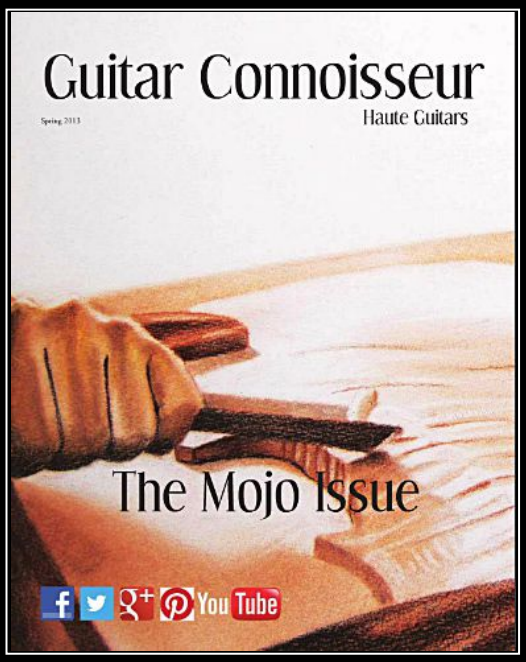
"Trey Anastasio is another artist that I consider to be a "Mic Hugger". This shot was a result of patience and waiting for Trey to step back from the mic. Upon doing so he happened to make this great expression"

Guitar Connoisseur

Back Issues







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